

THE GOOD STEWARDS SERIES

First installment in the "Good Stewards" series, a progression of academic and theological monographs issued by the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem.

Swords *into* Ploughshares

CHRISTIAN ZIONISM AND THE BATTLE OF ARMAGEDDON

BY DAVID PARSONS

"Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." I Corinthians 4:1



INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN EMBASSY JERUSALEM

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

SECTION 1:

THE MOUNTING CHALLENGE TO CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

- A. ARMAGEDDON IN CONTEXT
- B. ARMAGEDDON AND THE FOURTH ESTATE
- C. SCARE TACTICS OF THE LEFT
- D. THE EMERGING ARAB CHRISTIAN–EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE
- E. BACK TO BASICS
- F. DEFINITIONS

SECTION 2:

COVENANTAL THEOLOGY – THE FOUNDATION OF BIBLICAL ZIONISM

- A. THE NATURE OF DIVINE COVENANT
- B. THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT – THE COVENANT OF DECISION
- C. THE MOSAIC COVENANT – THE COVENANT OF INSTRUCTION
- D. THE DAVIDIC COVENANT – THE COVENANT OF REWARD
- E. THE NEW COVENANT – THE COVENANT OF ABILITY
- F. AN ENDURING LAND AND PEOPLE
 - I. A HIDDEN PEOPLE
 - II. A HIDDEN LAND
- G. THE COVENANTS AND THE MINISTRY OF THE PROPHETS

SECTION 3:

ENTERING THE LAND – THE QUESTION OF JUSTICE

- A. STAKING OUT A POSITION
- B. A TIME OF FAVOR
- C. TIMELESS CONDITIONS
- D. THE JUSTICE OF GOD
- E. MINISTRY OF COMFORT
- F. MINISTRY OF WARNING

CONCLUSION

Note: All Scripture references are to the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB) unless otherwise indicated.

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SWORDS INTO PLOUGHSHARES

CHRISTIAN ZIONISM AND THE BATTLE OF ARMAGEDDON

INTRODUCTION

As the nation of Israel continues to struggle for legitimacy and security against an array of daunting political, moral and existential challenges, nothing seems out of bounds for her most virulent adversaries. Even the tragedy of the Holocaust has been turned into yet another blunt instrument with which to strike out against her, as many are unduly equating Israel's treatment of the Palestinians to the Nazi treatment of Jews.

In the same spirit, those who offer support to Israel in the Christian world are being delegitimized and even demonized by a growing chorus of critics in the media, the Left and even among fellow Christians. Our moral and biblical stand with Israel is under unprecedented scrutiny and most discussions on Christian Zionism inevitably seem to turn to the question of our 'real' motives. Often we are portrayed as a recent outgrowth of the American Christian Right and its supposed efforts to impose its political will in and through Washington. Even more sinister, we are accused of blocking the way to peace in the Middle East or of having some dark 'end time' agenda that seeks to hasten the Apocalypse and force one last, massive convert-or-die scenario on the Jewish people.

Regrettably, such portrayals are a gross distortion of the true heart of the Christian Zionist movement, its biblical inspiration, long and proud history, global reach and honorable aims.

This monograph is the first in a series of academic and theological papers, entitled the *Good Stewards* series, intended to address the criticism and charges against Christian Zionism in relation to the way this biblical belief system is understood and advocated by the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem. The ICEJ is a mainstream Christian ministry with a worldwide constituency that includes Evangelical, Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox believers from over 125 countries, all with one common denominator: Each one has a God-given, often inexplicable love for Israel and the Bible. In reading that Bible, they have realized it has favorable things to say about Israel and the Jewish people, including the promise of a future restoration to their ancient homeland.

Thus as a leading voice and vanguard for the global Christian Zionist movement, the ICEJ seeks to place on the public record more fully the theological foundations of our beliefs and actions, and the compelling love for all humanity that is our core motivation. The *Good Stewards* series is also meant to identify and resolve some of the doctrinal errors concerning Israel that are resident in both Replacement Theology and Dispensationalism.

Our theology, actions and motives are based on biblical principles and promises, which are backed up by biblical prophecies and New Testament truths. Our position is best identified as Biblical Zionism, which rests on Covenantal Theology. Our approach looks beyond the evolving concerns of 'political' Zionism in our day and views both the Jewish people and Land of Israel as chosen by God long ago for

purposes of world redemption. Thus we have the interest and fate of the entire world in heart and mind when we defend Israel's restoration to her land.

This introductory work in the *Good Stewards* series will expand on Biblical Zionism and Covenantal Theology in order to lay the groundwork for future papers in this series. Among other issues, it also will specifically address the urgent question of whether Christian Zionists are indeed 'thirsting for Armageddon.'

SECTION 1

THE MOUNTING CHALLENGE TO CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

A. ARMAGEDDON IN CONTEXT

Beginning in the 16th chapter of the Book of Revelation, the Battle of Armageddon is described as one final and immense confrontation over Jerusalem that takes place in northern Israel between rebellious nations led by the Anti-Christ and Christ Himself as He returns to the earth. It is a prophesied event known throughout the world, the subject of movies, best-selling books and ceaseless press attention. It even has been absorbed within Islamic Apocalyptic thinking as a coming final battle over Jerusalem before Judgment Day.¹

Thus it is fair to say that nearly everyone has at least heard of Armageddon to some extent. However, many do not know that the book of Revelation, the last book in the Christian Bible, was written by a Jew, the Apostle John, and that nearly all of its 'revelations' are actually based on passages and concepts introduced and developed in much earlier books in the Bible, all the way back to Genesis. For instance, Isaiah 11:4 contains the same imagery of Revelation 19:15 of the Lord striking the earth "with the rod of His mouth." Both accounts foretell of a time when a global struggle over a re-gathered Israel births the long-awaited Messianic Kingdom on earth.

Armageddon therefore marks a final judgment of God on mankind's rebellion against Him. Yet it should not be seen as the 'end of the world,' but as the beginning of a wonderful new one, where "*the wolf will dwell with the lamb... and the lion shall eat straw like an ox... and the nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra... For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*" (Isaiah 11:6-9)

In the resolutions of the Fourth International Christian Congress on Biblical Zionism, in February 2001, the ICEJ went firmly on record as stating that we are not longing for the fateful battle of Armageddon, but rather for...

"that glorious vision of coming peace for Israel and for the world which was first proclaimed in times past in the sacred writings of the Hebrew prophets and confirmed by our Lord and His Apostles. We consider this biblical concept of peace to be the one that has furnished hope and shaped human history like none other, inspiring faith and uprightness throughout successive generations and surpassing still any other

¹ See, Manfred Gerstenfeld, "Jihad, Apocalypse, and Anti-Semitism, An Interview with Prof. Richard Landes," *Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs*, September 1, 2004, <http://www.jcpa.org/phas/phas-24.htm>.

path to world peace yet conceived of man. It is our enduring devotion to this promised epoch of Messianic peace and rest that ever governs our approach to the present circumstances confronting Israel, the Church and the world... No greater hope has ever been instilled in the heart of mankind, as when 'they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more' (Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3)."

It is a little known irony that these very words from the Hebrew prophets – “*they shall beat their swords into ploughshares*” – are inscribed into a stone wall outside the headquarters of the United Nations in New York City. They are seen everyday by world diplomats entering UN offices where the State of Israel and the Jewish people are singled out for constant contempt and machinations.² Do they not know that both Isaiah and Micah declare in the same passages that this vision of universal peace will arrive only after God has judged the nations for coming against a re-gathered Jewish people in Jerusalem? Why then is no one accusing the UN of trying to bring on Armageddon? Why are Christian Zionists alone the targets of this slander?

B. ARMAGEDDON AND THE FOURTH ESTATE

The media has recently focused on Christian Zionism as though it were something new, although it dates back several centuries and saw its greatest achievements in the Balfour Declaration of 1917 and US President Truman’s diplomatic recognition of the re-born nation of Israel in 1948.³

The tenor of much reporting on Christian Zionism has turned increasingly hostile in recent years, tending to distort the general public’s understanding of its true motives and beliefs. In but one typical example, an article in 1999 by the *Boston Globe’s* Jerusalem Bureau Chief described the ICEJ and the thousands of Christian pilgrims from 100 countries attending our annual Feast of Tabernacles celebration as “militant”... “fringe”... “fierce”... “extreme”... “zealous”... and finally back to “extreme rightist[s].”⁴

Some in the Israeli press have tended to be no less kind. A special weekend report in the Hebrew daily *Ha’aretz* once described our Feast pilgrims as “slant-eyed,” “pot-bellied” and “absent-minded,” while explaining that we fully expected then-Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, as “God’s messenger,” to “coronate” Jesus as ruler of a “Christian kingdom” that would come after the destruction of Israel and conversion of a surviving Jewish remnant.⁵

² Prof. Anne Bayefsky, a Senior Fellow at the Hudson Institute and an Adjunct Professor at Columbia University Law School, has recently issued several scholarly papers indicting the United Nations for the rampant anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism operating within its various organs, prompting UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to hold a one-day summit on the problem. See, for example, Anne Bayefsky, 2004, “One Small Step - Is the U.N. finally ready to get serious about anti-Semitism?” *WSJ Opinion Journal*, June 21, 2004, posted at <http://www.opinionjournal.com/extra/?id=110005245>

³ Daniel Pipes, “[Christian Zionism:] Israel’s Best Weapon?” *New York Post*, July 15, 2003. Also available at <http://www.danielpipes.org/article/1148>

⁴ Charles M. Sennott, “Evangelicals Gather in Israel,” *Boston Globe*, October 2, 1999.

⁵ Yoav Kaveh, “Messiah Now,” *Ha’aretz*, November 7, 1997. Interestingly, the version of the article in the paper’s English edition was somewhat toned down.

This type of negative reporting mushroomed in the lead-up to Millennium observances in the year 2000, in part due to the fortuitous convergence of the ‘end-game’ of the Oslo peace process and hyped concerns about the Y2K computer bug. It is fair to say that nearly every major media firm worldwide published or broadcast overblown stories about the rising Christian expectations of the Apocalypse and Second Coming of Christ.

As press spokesman for the ICEJ, this author granted some 200 interviews with major media outlets on the subject in the 18-month period preceding January 1, 2000.⁶ Approximately half of these reporters were intent on focusing on all the Christian fanatics who were supposedly coming to Israel that would either contract Jerusalem Syndrome or try to blow up the Dome of the Rock shrine on the Temple Mount and thereby ‘force the end.’ In one memorable, short-lived conversation, a journalist for a certain German magazine was adamant: “We only want the Christian crazies! Just give me the crazies! Where are they? Do you have their phone number?”

Two more serious treatments of the subject stand out from that time period, however, with each reflecting the typical coverage of their media colleagues while bringing a more thorough investigative approach.

The first was an extensive cover article in *Christianity Today* compiled by Timothy P. Weber, then-Dean of Northern Baptist Seminary, and entitled, “How Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friend.”⁷ Adopting a more respectful tone, Weber traced the origins of Dispensationalist thinking and Pre-Millennialism in England in the 1800s; its export to America by Plymouth Brethren founder John Nelson Darby; its inclusion, along with belief in a pre-Tribulation ‘Rapture’ of the saints, in the popular Scofield Reference Bible in the early 1900s; and the more contemporary expression of Christian Zionism that has developed since the re-birth of the State of Israel in 1948 and flourished further with the reunification of Jerusalem in 1967.⁸

With some variation here and there, Weber’s basic narrative on the origins and history of Dispensationalism and Pre-Millennialism, its impact on today’s Christian Zionism,

⁶ This included reporters from *AP*, *Reuters*, *BBC*, *CNN*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *The Washington Post*, *National Public Radio*, *The Jerusalem Post*, *The Jerusalem Report* and *The Boston Globe*, to name but a few of the English-language press, let alone media in other languages. Due to the obsessive and often distorted coverage of the topic, the ICEJ released an official two-page statement assuring that no prominent Christian leader was assigning any prophetic significance to the year 2000, among other things. See ICEJ, “Statement on the Millennium,” January 13, 1999, posted at <http://christianactionforisrael.org/2000.html> See also, Danielle Haas, “Zionist Christians urge Israel to think positive,” *Reuters*, September 28, 1999, posted at <http://www.rickross.com/reference/millennium/millennium31.html>. See also, “Christian pilgrims seeking apocalypse alarm some Israelis,” *CNN.com*, September 28, 1999, posted at <http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/meast/9909/28/israel.christian.march/>; and Lee Hockstader, “Pilgrims From Far and Wide ‘Come Home’ To Holy Land,” *The Washington Post*, September 29, 1999.

⁷ Timothy P. Weber, “How Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friend,” *Christianity Today*, October 5, 1998: pp. 38-49. Rev. Weber is now president of Memphis Theological Seminary and has since published a new book on the subject.

⁸ *ibid.* See also Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism, 1875-1982*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987 reprint edition.

and the movement's 'anticipation' of Armageddon, has been constantly replicated elsewhere, even in the Arab media and on Islamic portals.⁹

The tale, or shall we say plot, has thickened somewhat, with obligatory references these days to Hal Lindsey's best-selling book *The Late, Great Planet Earth* and the hugely successful marketing of the apocalyptic *Left Behind* series by authors Jerry Jenkins and Tim LaHaye, together with the Rapture of true believers to Heaven before the Tribulation, leaving the Jews behind to face horrific convert-or-die scenarios.¹⁰

Without going into great detail, it is important to note here that Weber's scholarship, and most of its many carbon copies both before and since, sadly and uniformly fail to adequately trace the true and noble origins of Christian Zionism back to the very infancy of the Protestant Reformation in the late 1500s. In this earlier era, brave Christians were excommunicated and even burned at the stake by their co-religionists for daring to say, on Scriptural grounds, that God still loved the Jews. Indeed, the Puritans, Pilgrims and other persecuted sects were forced by the established Churches to flee Europe for the New World due, in part, to their philo-Semitism, Covenant concepts and belief in the future restoration of Israel.¹¹

Further, this basic take on the Darby/Scofield connection, and its impact on the theology of their supposed progeny, the Christian Zionists of today, is seriously flawed in its handling and analysis of the historic span that it does cover, especially concerning the British "Restorationists" who directly impacted Theodor Herzl and the Zionist movement, as this and future papers in this series shall further illuminate. Nonetheless, this standard, but deficient narrative is out there and it is causing much confusion, misunderstanding and harm, to say the least.

⁹ See, for example, Rod Dreher, "Evangelicals and Jews Together: An unlikely alliance," *National Review Online*, April 5, 2002, at <http://www.nationalreview.com/dreher/dreher040502.asp>. See also Jane Lampman, "Mixing politics and prophecy," *Christian Science Monitor*, July 7, 2004, at <http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0707/p15s01-lire.html>; Lampman, "The end of the world," *Christian Science Monitor*, February 18, 2004, at <http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0218/p11s01-lire.html>; Malcolm Foster, "Road Map Riles Some Evangelicals," *The Associated Press*, July 25, 2003; Azmi Bishara, "Apocalyptic Visions," *Al-Ahram*, October 23, 2002; and Edward Said, "Europe versus America," *Al-Ahram*, November 14, 2002. See also the extensive materials in the section on "Christian Fundamentalist support for Israel" posted at the Arab/Islamic site <http://student.cs.ucc.ie/>.

¹⁰ See, for example, Dreher, "Evangelicals and Jews Together," Lampman, "Mixing politics and prophecy"; Lampman, "The end of the world"; Jane Lampman, "Apocalyptic - and atop the best-seller lists," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 29, 2002, at <http://www.csmonitor.com/2002/0829/p14s01-lire.html>; Bill Broadway, "Direst of Predictions For War in Iraq," *The Washington Post*, March 8, 2003, at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn?pagename=article&node=&contentId=A58894-2003Mar7¬Found=true>; and Don Lattin, "War in Babylon has evangelicals seeing Earth's final days," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 22, 2003, at <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2003/03/22/MN284946.DTL>

¹¹ More will be developed on the history of Christian Zionism in future papers in this series. In the meantime, see, among others: Benjamin Netanyahu, *A Place Among the Nations: Israel and the World*. New York: Bantam, 1993; Michael Pragai, *Faith and Fulfillment: Christians and the Return to the Promised Land*. London: Valentine, 1985; Marvin Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI and Center for Judaic Christian Studies, Dayton, OH, 1994; David Parsons (ed.), *Christians and Israel: Essays on Biblical Zionism and Islamic Fundamentalism*. Jerusalem: International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, 1996; Joan McWhirter (ed.), *Christian Zionism and its Biblical Basis*. Jerusalem: International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, 1988.

The second article of note in the pre-2000 time frame was yet another cover story, this one in *The Jerusalem Report* magazine blaring the warning, “Danger: Millennium Ahead.”¹² Crafted after extensive research by senior writer Gershom Gorenberg, the piece took a sober look at the potential security risks Israel might face from someone – Jewish, Christian or Muslim – trying to ‘force the end’ on Jerusalem’s highly-contested Temple Mount, the scene of Judgment Day for all three faiths.

Like so many other journalists at that time, Gorenberg cited two particular sources for much of his troubling information. The first was the Jerusalem District head psychiatrist, Dr. Yair Bar-El, who for months had been predicting that some 40,000 Christian tourists to Israel would come down with some form of Jerusalem Syndrome over the Millennium season, and at least 1,000 would need hospitalization.¹³ The second source was Dr. Richard Landes, professor of medieval history at Boston University and head of the Center for Millennial Studies, a think-tank scurrying to assess where the latest messianic pretender like David Koresh might provoke the next Waco-style conflagration.¹⁴ At some point in his research, Gorenberg signed on with Dr. Landes’ Center as its designated Christian cult hunter inside Israel.

In the article, Gorenberg also quotes several prominent Evangelical ministers voicing belief in a pre-Tribulation Rapture, followed by a dark time when two-thirds of the Jews in Israel will die and the remaining one-third will convert to Christianity by the time of the final battle of Armageddon. One prophetic teacher who will go unnamed here was quoted as saying the Tribulation “is going to make the Holocaust of Germany look like a picnic.”¹⁵

Yet Gorenberg was careful to distinguish that not all Evangelicals espouse that line, citing the ICEJ as his prime example:

*At the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, spokesman David Parsons says that his institution’s goal is “to convey to the Jewish people that you have seen Christian anti-Semitism in the past, but we represent a different attitude, that it’s time to favor Zion.” Parsons strongly rejects “the convert or die scenarios” for Jews. “It’s a repulsive thing.”*¹⁶

The Gorenberg article apparently set off alarm bells in Israel’s security establishment and a special Millennium task force was assembled from various intelligence branches to assess the danger and prepare for any religious fanatics trying to enter the country in time for the Millennium celebrations. This task force solicited and received advice from the ICEJ on several occasions.

¹² Gershom Gorenberg, “Danger: Millennium Ahead,” *The Jerusalem Report*, February 19, 1998: pp. 14-19.

¹³ Based upon this author’s multiple conversations with Dr. Bar-El at the time, he was being interviewed daily concerning his predictions on Jerusalem Syndrome, and was kindly referring many journalists on to me.

¹⁴ See Center for Millennial Studies, <http://www.mille.org>.

¹⁵ Gorenberg, “Danger,” p. 18.

¹⁶ Gorenberg, “Danger,” p. 18.

When the Millennium passed quietly and no one came down with the ‘syndrome,’ many journalists were embarrassed and reluctant to re-visit the subject for a while.¹⁷ Gorenberg, however, spent the next couple of years compiling his research into a book, *The End of Days: Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount*,¹⁸ which has sold well since publication and is even plugged on the *Jerusalem Report* Web site (<http://www.jrep.com>) despite the magazine’s policy of not reviewing books by staffers. Regrettably, the book no longer distinguished the ICEJ’s views from the convert-or-die eschatology of others, but rather lumped the ICEJ in with what he portrayed as a bizarre band of Christian misfits in a “five act play” in which the Jews “disappear in the fourth act.”

In turn, *The End of Days* spawned a special ‘Armageddon’ report on the *CBS News* magazine show *60 Minutes*, which turned into a major coup for the celebrated program when correspondent Bob Simon goaded Rev. Jerry Falwell into labeling Muhammad a “terrorist.”¹⁹ This in turn spurred even more articles and programs, including a major documentary series on Israel and Christian Zionism currently under production by Japan’s state-run TV network *NHK*, the largest broadcast company in the world.

Given the ‘herd mentality’ of the press, it has reached the point where every catastrophic event now requires media outlets to go dig up stories on whether Evangelicals believe it has triggered the End Times. “The tendency of the media to connect any major Middle East event to biblical prophecy has itself become predictable,” notes Todd Hertz, an editor with *Christianity Today*.²⁰ Indeed, both the September 11, 2001 terror attacks and the Iraq War of 2003 prompted a rash of articles on whether Christians thought the Apocalypse was imminent.²¹

¹⁷ See Daniel Ben-Tal, “No sects, please,” *The Jerusalem Post Online Edition*, May 21, 2004, at <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=JPost/JPArticle/ShowFull&cid=1085023338983>.

¹⁸ Gorenberg, *The End of Days: Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount*. New York: Free Press, 2002.

¹⁹ Bob Simon, “Zion’s Christian Soldiers,” *CBS News 60 Minutes*, June 8, 2003. Transcript available at <http://cbsnews.com/stories/2002/10/03/60minutes/printable524268.shtml>. In an example of the general media ignorance concerning the Bible, Solly Granatstein, the Jewish producer of the *60 Minutes* program, asked ICEJ Executive Director Malcolm Hedding to explain our views on the ‘Christian’ book of Daniel.

²⁰ Todd Hertz, “The End is Not Yet,” *Christianity Today*, March 24, 2003, at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/112/44.0.html>.

²¹ For September 11 stories, see Hertz, “Was September 11 the Beginning of the End?” *Christianity Today*, September 17, 2001, at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/138/34.0.html>. For Iraq War coverage, see Broadway, “Direst of Predictions For War in Iraq”; Lattin, “War in Babylon has evangelicals seeing Earth’s final days”; Uwe Siemon-Netto, “Analysis: Field day of doom prophets,” *United Press International*, March 17, 2003, at <http://www.upi.com/view.cfm?StoryID=20030317-052855-1178r>; Hertz, “The End is Not Yet”; Ted Olsen, “Weblog: Newspapers Miss the Real End-Times Story,” *Christianity Today*, March 24, 2003, at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/112/21.0.html>.

C. SCARE TACTICS OF THE LEFT

In parallel and often in tandem with these negative reports are the aggressive efforts of the political and cultural Left to further their own agendas by branding Christian Zionists as dangerous, racist and thirsting for Armageddon.

Earlier this year, liberal British commentator Robert Fisk charged in an *Independent* column that U.S. President George W. Bush had become Osama bin Laden's "recruiting agent" and "legitimized" terrorism by...

*"giv[ing] way to the crazed world of Christian Zionism. The fundamentalist Christians who support Israel's theft of the West Bank on the grounds that the state of Israel must exist there according to God's law until the second coming, believe that Jesus will return to earth and the Israelis – for this is the Bush 'Christian Sundie' belief – will then have to convert to Christianity or die in the battle of Armageddon. I kid thee not."*²²

According to one anti-Israel writer, the late Grace Halsell, Christian Zionists practice the same form of "muscular Christianity" that their forefathers once followed when they slaughtered Indians "to win the West." "The American fundamentalists" she claimed, see Armageddon as an event "most earnestly to be desired."²³

In a blaring headline this past April, commentator George Monbiot informed readers of *The Guardian* that "Their beliefs are bonkers, but they are at the heart of power: US Christian fundamentalists are driving Bush's Middle East policy." In the body of the opinion piece, he insisted that several million Christian Zionists in America "have succumbed to an extraordinary delusion," before concluding that they are a "major political constituency... which is actively seeking to provoke a new world war."²⁴

Looking into the Arab world, the late Orientalist scholar Edward Said, a tenured professor at Columbia University and foremost Palestinian intellectual, once argued in Egypt's leading weekly *Al-Ahram* that: "[T]he vast number of Christian fanatics in the US, who form the core of George Bush's support... are, in my opinion, a menace to the world and furnish Bush's government with its rationale for punishing evil while righteously condemning whole populations to submission and poverty." He went on to warn that the Christian Right is "rabidly pro-Israel" and yet "deeply anti-Semitic" for believing that Jews who do not convert by Messiah's coming "will be doomed to eternal perdition."²⁵

²² Robert Fisk, "By endorsing Ariel Sharon's plan George Bush has legitimised terrorism," *The Independent* (of London), April 16, 2004; also available at <http://www.robert-fisk.com/articles396.htm>.

²³ Grace Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics: Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear War*. Westport: Lawrence Hill & Co, 1989.

²⁴ George Monbiot, "Their beliefs are bonkers, but they are at the heart of power," *The Guardian*, April 20, 2004, at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,1195568,00.html>.

²⁵ Said, "Europe versus America."

Some commentators in the Israeli press have joined the chorus over the years, attempting to frighten Israelis away from Christian Zionists in an apparent bid to bolster the Israeli left's own political agenda.²⁶

Given the worldwide proliferation of such negative reports concerning the supposedly scary credo of Christian Zionists, it is little wonder that a respected Israeli academic, Professor Yosef Dan of the Hebrew University, a past winner of the nation's coveted Israel Prize, felt compelled for the sake of his people to undertake serious research on Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism, and regrettably has concluded in a new book in Hebrew that we secretly are out to convert Jews under the strain of some new Holocaust; that we really are no different than all the Christian anti-Semites who have tarnished much of the Church age.²⁷

D. THE EMERGING ARAB CHRISTIAN–EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

A third anti-Christian Zionist element is now entering the mix in an unprecedented fashion, as the traditional alliance between local Arab Christian clergy and their sympathizers in the liberal Protestant churches abroad are being increasingly bolstered by a growing number of professing Evangelical Christian leaders, scholars and theologians, including many who claim to be ex-Christian Zionists. This emerging tripartite alliance, in order to further its own pro-Palestinian political objectives, is waging a deliberate and increasingly aggressive campaign not simply to 'challenge' Christian Zionism, but to discredit and demonize its adherents and to distort and ridicule its true motivations and beliefs.

The traditional Arab Christian/Liberal Protestant alliance on behalf of the Palestinians dates back several decades, while the Evangelical Christian component is of more recent origin.²⁸

When liberal Protestant denominations first began coalescing with other confessions to form the World Council of Churches (WCC) in the late 1930s, their most immediate humanitarian concern was the plight of European Jewry, increasingly oppressed and endangered by the expanding menace of Nazi Germany. The hostilities of World War II prolonged the Council's gestation period, however, and by the time the WCC formally convened its first meeting in the post-Holocaust era in 1948,

²⁶ See, for example, Akiva Eldar, "Gary Bauer and Likud: An Unholy Alliance with the Christian Right," *Ha'aretz*, April 8, 2003; and Eldar, "With Friends Like These," *Ha'aretz*, October 3, 2002.

²⁷ Prof. Yosef Dan and this author were both interviewed on the subject by anchor Ya'acov Achimier for Israeli television's most popular news program, *Around the World*, Israel TV Channel One, October 4, 2003.

²⁸ See Moshe Aumann, *Conflict & Connection: The Jewish-Christian-Israel Triangle*. Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing, 2003; and Paul Charles Merkley, *Christian Attitudes Towards The State Of Israel*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001. This paper does not delve into Catholic attitudes toward Jews or Israel and the Palestinians, nor into Vatican relations with the State of Israel or the Palestinians. It should be noted, however, that the Roman Catholic Church under the leadership of Pope John Paul II has generally tried to be even-handed politically in the Arab-Israeli conflict, working out a recognition accord with Israeli authorities while granting PLO chairman Yasser Arafat numerous papal audiences. Moreover, interfaith relations under this pontiff have advanced significantly, with the Catholic Church declaring anti-Semitism a sin, recently equating anti-Zionism with the sin of anti-Semitism, and recognizing God's enduring spiritual covenant with the Jews, as noted in the above sources.

reports from expatriate Christian figures in Jerusalem were just arriving of a developing Palestinian refugee crisis in the Holy Land.²⁹

By the time of the 1967 Six-Day War and Israel's entry into Judea/Samaria (the West Bank) and Gaza, the WCC and most mainline Protestant churches had increasingly adopted pro-Palestinian sympathies, while the affiliated Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), formed to represent the indigenous and ancient Oriental Churches, became a main conduit for expressing and channeling Western Christian support for the Palestinians. In time, the MECC became highly critical of the activities of Dispensational Zionists, and the ICEJ in particular.³⁰

At the same time, the Palestine Liberation Organization was quietly pursuing an 'indigenization' process, urging the promotion of native Arab clergymen sympathetic to Palestinian nationalism to positions of leadership within the local parishes or dioceses of the traditional Oriental and even Western churches in Jerusalem. Due in part to its extensive land holdings in the Holy Land, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem has held out as the last major church yet to appoint a local Arab/Palestinian cleric to its top office in Jerusalem.³¹

Meanwhile, though most Evangelical Christians have long tended to hold a favorable view of Israel for biblical and moral reasons,³² some Evangelicals began gravitating towards a pro-Palestinian stand. Many were impacted by the tales of suffering they heard and read from local Arab Christians, chief among them being Father Elias Chacour.³³

Each of the elements of this emerging Arab Christian/Protestant/Evangelical alliance against Christian Zionism were fully on display at a recent conference convened in Jerusalem on April 14-18, 2004 by the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology

²⁹ Michael W. King, *The Palestinians and the Churches, Vol. I: 1948-1956*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1981.

³⁰ Merkley, *Christian Attitudes Towards The State Of Israel*; Stephen Sizer, "Dispensationalism Examined Politically," lecture delivered at *Musalaha Theological Seminar*, September 1997, Jerusalem. Transcript available at <http://www.virginiawater.co.uk/christchurch/articles/articles.html>.

³¹ Steve Rodan, "PA Intensifying Bid To Control Churches," *The Jerusalem Post*, October 4, 1998; and William A. Orme, Jr., "Jerusalem Christians Now Back Palestinian Sovereignty," *The New York Times*, December 24, 2000. See also Merkley, *Christian Attitudes Towards The State Of Israel*.

³² See Aumann, *Conflict & Connection*. In a 2003 poll commissioned by the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, 43% of American Evangelical respondents said their primary reason for supporting Israel was its identity as a democracy and US ally; another 35% cited biblical prophecy as the main basis of their pro-Israel support. The poll is cited in Hertz, "Opinion Roundup: The Evangelical View of Israel," *Christianity Today*, June 11, 2003, at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/123/31.0.html>. See also "Roadblocks and Voting Blocs (Editorial)," *Christianity Today*, July 28, 2003, at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/008/22.32.html>.

³³ Father Elias Chacour is an ordained priest in the Greek Melkite Church, an Orthodox body in communion with the Vatican. He has authored several books, most notably *Blood Brothers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zundervan, 1982), which provides an account (now under serious questioning) of an alleged Jewish massacre in his Christian village along the Lebanese border sometime during the 1947-48 War of Independence. As indicated in Michael Prior's book, *They Came and They Saw* (London: Melisende, 1999), both Stephen Sizer and Donald E. Wagner [See fn. 40 below] credit Chacour with transforming their views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict away from Christian Zionism. See also Wagner, *Anxious for Armageddon: A call to Partnership for Middle Eastern and western Christians*. Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1995.

Center.³⁴ This fifth International Sabeel Conference met for the express purpose of “Challenging Christian Zionism” and concluded with a “stinging rebuke” of its “heretical teachings.”³⁵

Among its participants was the Lutheran Bishop of Jerusalem, Rev. Munib Younan, who has repeatedly suggested that Christians who espouse Zionism ought to be expunged from the Church.³⁶ Bishop Younan recently told a Danish newspaper, “I hereby declare that Christian Zionism is not only a sick theology but it is a heresy, right along with Aryanism and Nestorianism and others.”³⁷

Also noteworthy was an appearance and greeting by Archmandrite Atallah Hanna of the Greek Orthodox Church, who was dismissed in recent years as a spokesman for the Greek Patriarchate of Jerusalem after making numerous controversial statements against Israel, including repeated remarks in support of suicide terrorism.³⁸

Another key local Arab clergyman involved in the Sabeel conference was the Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem Riah Abu El-Assal, an Israeli Arab Christian from Nazareth with a long record of support for Palestinian nationalism, including recent comments maintaining that all Palestinian martyrs [including suicide bombers] “receive eternal life.”³⁹

³⁴ See <http://www.sabeel.org/>. The Sabeel Center was founded in the early 1990s by Rev. Naim Ateek, an Anglican Canon of St. George’s Cathedral in Jerusalem, who has become a pivotal figure in unifying the Arab/Evangelical Christian alliance. Sabeel’s stated purpose is to develop a unique Palestinian version of Liberation Theology, based on the modern notion of ‘regionalized’ theologies that have been credited with sweeping political and social change in Latin America and South Africa. While this paper is not intended to address Liberation Theology *per se*, it is worth noting at this point that the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has issued a pastoral letter entitled “Instruction on Certain Aspects of the ‘Theology of Liberation’” warning the “faithful” of this ideology’s Marxist origins. (http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_c_faith_doc_19840806_theology-liberation_en.html).

Dr. Ateek has written *Justice and Only Justice* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), and was co-editor of *Faith and the Intifada: Palestinian Christian Voices*, Editors: Naim S. Ateek, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Marc Ellis (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992). Much like Chacour, Ateek claims that his family was driven from their comfortable home in the town of Beisan (Beit She’an) by Jewish forces when he was 11. See, Jane Lampman, “Mixing prophecy and politics,” *Christian Science Monitor*, July 7, 2004.

³⁵ James Solheim, “Jerusalem Conference calls Christian Zionism a ‘heresy,’” *Episcopal News Service*, April 28, 2004; Paul Wilkinson, “Report of The 5th International Sabeel Conference, April 14-18, 2004,” [This second report was compiled based on Wilkinson’s first-hand account and taped lectures and was made available to this author].

³⁶ See, for example, Itamar Marcus, “Bethlehem Committee Meeting Calls for Repudiation of Zionist Christianity,” *Palestinian Media Watch Bulletin* of July 3, 2003, posted at <http://www.pmw.org.il>, translating an article in Arabic from *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida* on July 2, 2003.

³⁷ Ann E. Hafften, “Challenge the Implications of ‘Christian Zionism,’” *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, February 19, 2003, posted at http://www.elca.org/jle/articles/contemporary_issues/article.hafften_ann_e.html; citing Bishop Younan’s January 2003 Newsletter, found on the Web site of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jerusalem at <http://www.holyland-lutherans.org/>.

³⁸ Haim Shapiro, “Police Question Greek Orthodox priest on ties to terror,” *The Jerusalem Post*, August 23, 2002; “Greek Orthodox Church Spokesman Replaced for Supporting Suicide Attacks,” *MEMRI Special Dispatch No. 405*, July 30, 2002; “Palestinian Christian Leader in Praise of Martyrdom Operations,” *MEMRI Dispatch No. 459*, January 23, 2003; “Palestinian Archbishop tells Christians to take part in Suicide attacks against Israel,” posted at <http://www.idf.il/newsite/images/0111-3p2.gif>.

Joining these Arab clerics were such Evangelical authors and speakers as Gary Burge, Donald Wagner, and Stephen Sizer,⁴⁰ while an eclectic mix of other Christian, Jewish and secular academics and writers also participated.

Dr. Michael Prior, a Professor of Bible and Theology at St. Mary's College in England, made his Evangelical colleagues slightly uncomfortable when he openly questioned the authenticity of the Bible, insisting it is "a dangerous book" that legitimizes and mandates genocide. Prior also surmised that the authors of the biblical narratives were "very narrow minded, xenophobic, perhaps militaristic... pin-headed bigots," and described Joshua as the "patron saint of ethnic cleansers."⁴¹

The most notable absentee from the conference was the new Archbishop of Canterbury, Rev. Rowan Williams, who was invited by Bishop Riah to give the keynote address but discreetly shied away from the gathering. Instead, Dr. Williams made an appearance by letter delivered through an emissary, Rev. Jonathan Gough, who explained that the Archbishop had to carefully weigh the risks of being identified with "the wrong voices" on the issues.⁴²

Conference attendees were angered not only at the Archbishop's absence, but also by his letter, which offered barely a nod to the Palestinian cause. Captioned "Holy Land and Holy People," William's dispatch dealt almost exclusively with setting forth his own theological understanding of Israel's rightful place in Scripture, including its

³⁹ Bishop Riah reportedly told an Arab Anglican gathering in Ramallah in 2003 that he offered, "Greetings of appreciation to all martyrs that were killed on the Land of Palestine." Quoting the Koran, he added that all such martyrs receive eternal life and they "live in the Kingdom of Heaven." Fasi Al-MaQai, "Anglican Bishop: 'Eternal Life for all martyrs of Palestine,'" February 6, 2003, posted at <http://www.comeandsee.co.il/article.php?sid=415&mode=thread&order=0>. In other recent anti-Israel moves, Bishop Riah has continued to provide convicted Israeli nuclear turncoat Mordechai Vanunu sanctuary in St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem. He also was signatory to a protest letter from the Bishops and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem voicing solidarity with a recent hunger strike by Palestinian security prisoners held in Israeli jails. [See, "Local churches back prison strike," *The Jerusalem Post*, August 23, 2004].

⁴⁰ Both Dr. Gary Burge and Dr. Donald E. Wagner have served as directors of the pro-Palestinian group Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding [<http://www.emeu.org/>] and with other interlocking pro-Palestinian organizations, and both write extensively and speak widely against Christian supporters of Israel. Burge is Professor of Theology at Wheaton College & Graduate School in Wheaton, Illinois and has authored numerous articles and books, including *Whose Land? Whose Promise?: What Christians Are Not Being Told About Israel and the Palestinians* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2003). Wagner is a professor of religion and Middle Eastern studies at North Park University, Chicago, Illinois, and has authored or contributed to several books, including *Anxious for Armageddon: A call to Partnership for Middle Eastern and western Christians*, (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1995), *Dying in the Land of Promise* (London: Melisende, 2001), and his latest work, *Peace or Armageddon?: The Unfolding Drama of the Middle East Accord*, (____: HarperCollins, 2004).

Dr. Stephen Sizer is Vicar at Christ Church, Virginia Water in Surrey, England, an area Tutor at the School of Theology, Westminster College, and chairman of the International Bible Society UK, among other positions. He has authored numerous papers and books, increasingly specializing in works critical of Christian Zionism and Dispensationalism, including his latest book, *Christian Zionism: Road Map to Armageddon?* (InterVarsity Press, to be published in September 2004). Many of Sizer's writings appear on his church's Web site at <http://www.virginiawater.co.uk/christchurch/articles/articles.html>.

⁴¹ Wilkinson, "Report on Sabeel Conference." Of note here, Sabeel founder Dr. Ateek has co-edited several books with Prior, including, *They Came and They Saw*, (London, Melisende, 1999); and *Holy Land – Hollow Jubilee: God, Justice and the Palestinians* (London, Melisende, 1999).

⁴² Wilkinson, "Report on Sabeel Conference."

enduring right to exist securely in its ancient homeland in order to pursue its continual calling from biblical times to this day as “the paradigm nation, the example held up to all nations of how a people lives in obedience to God and justice with one another.”⁴³

Undaunted, the Sabeel conference released a press statement near its conclusion which stated that Christian Zionism is “detrimental to a just peace in the Holy Land. This movement, with its elevation of modern political Zionism, provides a worldview where the Gospel is identified with the ideology of empire, colonialism, and militarism.”⁴⁴

A conference document attached to the press release further asserted that:

In its extreme form, [Christian Zionism] places an emphasis on apocalyptic events leading to the end of history rather than living Christ’s love and justice today... [W]e categorically reject Christian Zionist doctrines as a false teaching that undermines the biblical message of love, mercy, and justice... We reject the heretical teachings of Christian Zionism that facilitate and support [Israeli and U. S.] extremist policies as they advance a form of racial exclusivity and perpetual war rather than the gospel of universal love, redemption and reconciliation taught by Jesus Christ.”⁴⁵

The Sabeel conference’s concluding statement indicated its 600 participants from 30 countries had committed “with renewed energy” to “return to their countries to pursue a political solution to the conflict in the Holy Land...”⁴⁶

That commitment to activism against Christian Zionism was undoubtedly at work when the Presbyterian Church (USA), at its annual General Assembly in Richmond, Virginia in July of 2004, adopted a resolution committing the church to “actively oppose Christian Zionism.”⁴⁷ This PC-USA resolution is listed on a new Web site tracking anti-Christian Zionist church activities but deceptively named www.christianzionism.org. The site markets the writings of Burge, Sizer, Wagner and other closely affiliated Protestant opponents of Christian Zionism.⁴⁸

⁴³ Wilkinson, “Report on Sabeel Conference”; Solheim, “Jerusalem Conference.” Before assuming leadership of the Anglican Church, Archbishop Williams had expressed serious concern with Christian anti-Semitic attitudes creeping back into the church. See, Melanie Phillips, “Christians who hate the Jews,” *The Spectator* (UK), April 13, 2002.

⁴⁴ From text of press statement issued by The Fifth International Conference of the Sabeel Ecumenical Palestinian Liberation Theology Center, April 14-18, 2004, posted at <http://www.christianzionism.org/fulltext.asp?ID=7>; See also www.sabeel.org.

⁴⁵ Sabeel Conference press statement, *ibid*.

⁴⁶ Sabeel Conference press statement, *ibid*.

⁴⁷ Item 12-03 – Overture 04-34 “On Confronting Christian Zionism,” [See <http://www.pcusa.org/ga216>]. The resolution was submitted by the local Presbytery of Chicago, where Wagner pastors a Presbyterian church and Burge also lives. The resolution adopted definitions of Christian Zionism and Dispensationalism compiled by Burge, and it also recommends their works as reference materials on the subject.

⁴⁸ When recently visited, the site linked to a sharply critical article from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America’s official *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, February 19, 2003 issue, entitled “Challenge the Implications of ‘Christian Zionism,’” by Ann E. Hafften, http://www.elca.org/jle/articles/contemporary_issues/article.hafften_ann_e.html. It also linked to an official report from the June 2004 General Synod meeting of the Reformed Church in America, posted at <http://www.rca.org/> and

This expanding network of theologians, scholars, journalists and activists have developed an array of interlocking organizations and support systems, and are vigorously seeking to make inroads with denominational leaders, political figures and the media.⁴⁹

In July 2002, for example, Burge and Wagner were instrumental in garnering the signatures of some 58 prominent American Evangelicals on a letter to President Bush urging him to adopt a more “even-handed policy” in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to realize that, “Significant numbers of American evangelicals reject the way some have distorted biblical passages as their rationale for uncritical support for every policy and action of the Israeli government...”⁵⁰

The animosity in some of the Evangelical criticisms of Christian Zionists can be quite disturbing at times. Wagner once concluded that the ministry of the ICEJ, among other things:

“... is guilty of the sin of idolatry by worshipping state power in Israel and benefiting from its praises.”

“... has become a heretical cult by reducing the Christian church to a mere ‘parenthesis’ and by rejecting the local Christian community.”

entitled “Synod Acts on Middle East Issues,” indicating the RCA gathering “declared the ideology of Christian Zionism and the extreme form of dispensationalism that undergirds it to be a distortion of the biblical message, noting the impediment it represents to achieving a just peace in Israel/Palestine.”

Without naming its operators, the site www.christianzionism.org says it is run by “a group of evangelical pastors, academics and mission executives who have been disturbed by the growing influence of Christian Zionism on the political scene in America recognizing this ideology to be a major factor in the stalled peace process in Israel/Palestine.”

⁴⁹ An example of another recent conference convened with Evangelical participation specifically to confront Christian Zionism was “Zionism, Christian Zionism and the Challenge to the Churches,” sponsored by Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust and Friends of Sabeel-UK, *inter alia*, February 21, 2004. See <http://www.livingstonesonline.org.uk/events.htm>.

The expanding Arab/Evangelical network arrayed against Christian Zionism features numerous entities and publications, often with interlocking boards and cross-sponsorship, and includes: Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding (<http://www.emeu.org/>); Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation (<http://www.hcef.org/>); *Living Stones* magazine, edited by Duncan Macleod Macpherson, available at <http://www.livingstonesonline.org.uk>; *Holy Land Studies, A Multidisciplinary Journal*, edited by Michael Prior and Nur Masalha (See, <http://www.smuc.ac.uk/holylandstudies>); and Friends of Sabeel-North America (See, http://web.pdx.edu/~riadt/work/fosna/fos_steering.pdf).

Note that most of these entities have endorsed “The Jerusalem Sabeel Document: Principles For A Just Peace in Israel-Palestine” (available at www.sabeel.org), a plan calling for creating two sovereign and democratic states in confederation or federation, Israel and Palestine, with Jerusalem serving as capital of both. Ultimately, the document envisages one bi-national state between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, with equal rights and suffrage for all its citizens – “one state for two peoples and three religions.”

⁵⁰ See letter and list of signatories at http://campus.northpark.edu/centers/middle/mideast.letter_to_bush.htm; See also, Caryle Murphy, “Evangelical Leaders Ask Bush to Adopt Balanced Mideast Policy,” *The Washington Post*, July 27, 2002.

“... does not take Jesus Christ as its alpha and omega but focuses on Zionism in theory and practice.”⁵¹

In a paper equating the slaughter of Indian “savages” by a young American nation with the modern “myth” of Christian Zionism and its supposed disregard for the “ethnic cleansing” of native Palestinians in the Holy Land, Rev. John Huber states bluntly: “It is easy to **demonize** those who hold this position, particularly given what is at stake – the suffering of the Palestinian people. But I know of no other way to counter the perceptions which give rise to the myth.”⁵² [emphasis added]

One of their colleagues, Rev. Colin Chapman, says he “suspects” what holds back many denominations from using the word “heresy” and “unchurching” Dispensationalists and Christians Zionists is the simple fact that that there are so many of them out there.⁵³

E. BACK TO BASICS

For Christians Zionists to simply dismiss these mounting criticisms and threats of ex-communication even from fellow Evangelicals as ‘mockery’ and unbelief would be irresponsible and unconstructive. It has become clear that there is an urgent need for many pro-Israel Christians to undertake a serious introspection of their positions in light of the increased scrutiny upon our efforts, since it is affecting our ability to be effective ministers of the Gospel, not to mention the dire fears it is instilling in the Jewish people we profess to love. There is a huge disconnect between the genuine love and concern that God indeed has placed in our hearts for the Jews and the prophecy charts many Christians have tucked away in their heads – and this disconnect has caught the world’s attention!

Thankfully, these descriptions of Christian Zionists are extremely inaccurate when it comes to the positions of the ICEJ, which our critics widely consider a leading umbrella or “semi-official voice” for Christian Zionism.⁵⁴ We simply do not recognize ourselves in any of these harsh depictions. For example, we do not even subscribe to Dispensationalist views but Covenantal Theology, a fact that throws massive doubts onto the volumes of judgmental scholarship about us.

⁵¹ Wagner, *Anxious for Armageddon*, cited in a “case study” of the ICEJ by Stephen Sizer available at <http://www.christchurch-virginiawater.co.uk/articles/icejmelisende.htm>. For the record, the theme of the ICEJ’s annual Feast celebration in October 2000 was on the Lord Jesus Christ as “The Alpha and Omega.”

⁵² John Hubers, “Christian Zionism and the Myth of America,” *MECC News Report*, Autumn 2002, posted at http://www.mecchurches.org/newsreport/vol14_2/christianzionism.asp.

⁵³ Colin Chapman, “God’s Covenant – God’s Land?”, Tyndale Fellowship Triennial Conference, July 2003.

⁵⁴ Sizer has described the ICEJ as the “semi-official voice” of the wider coalition of Christian pro-Israel groups, saying its founding in 1980 represented “in some senses the coming of age of Dispensational Christian Zionism as a high profile concerted international movement.” Stephen Sizer, “Dispensationalism Examined Politically,” lecture delivered at Musalaha Theological Seminar: Jerusalem, September 1997, posted at <http://www.virginiawater.co.uk/christchurch/articles/articles.html>.

Furthermore, the inconsistencies in their own thinking can be quite confounding at times. They denounce Christian Zionist political activities yet rigorously engage in the same themselves. In another example, they tend to look at the historic figure of Jesus as a social ‘revolutionary’ liberating souls caught under the heel of Rome as a model for ‘resisting’ the modern ‘occupation’ of Israel. Yet as soon as his Jewish disciples ask him when is he going to “restore the kingdom to Israel” (Acts 1:6), they are labeled “nationalistic.”⁵⁵

The ICEJ understands the need for our Arab and Palestinian co-religionists to ‘distance’ themselves to some degree from Christian Zionists due to the intimidation they face from Islamic elements, which are accustomed to seeing them as ‘collaborators’ with the ‘Crusader West.’⁵⁶ We do not wish to devalue or question the spiritual credentials of any Christian group in the Holy Land and have always sought to be an instrument of reconciliation between Jew and Arab.

The more serious problem is that fellow Evangelicals have joined in summarily lumping together millions of devout Christians as constituting the primary threat to world peace, seemingly swept away by a grossly distorted interpretation of Scripture and a blood-thirsty desire for the destruction of both Palestinians, Israelis and ultimately all humankind. To actively contribute to this open vilification – even to the extreme of branding us ‘heretics’ and ‘idolaters’ – is an offense among brethren that must be carefully reconsidered. Yet the ICEJ welcomes this valuable and timely opportunity to respond to their criticisms while also offering our fellow Christian Zionists an alternative, biblically-sound way of approaching the momentous days ahead, developed over many years from our unique vantage point of Jerusalem. God has truly opened all of our hearts to Israel, may He now open the minds of our understanding.

F. DEFINITIONS

Before proceeding further, a few definitions are needed.

Most of our pro-Palestinian Christian critics adhere to Replacement Theology, the belief that because the Jewish nation rejected the Messianic credentials of Jesus, they are no longer in covenant with God, resulting in the Church replacing them as the ‘true Israel’ or ‘spiritual Israel,’ and now serving as the exclusive agent of God’s redemptive activity in the world.⁵⁷ Some also are seeking to develop a unique Palestinian version of Liberation Theology, which the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines as “a religious movement... that combines political philosophy usually of a Marxist orientation with a theology of salvation from injustice.”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ See, e.g., comments by Lutheran Arab pastor Mitri Raheb in, Wilkinson, “Report on Sabeel Conference.”

⁵⁶ See, William A. Orme, Jr., “Jerusalem Christians Now Back Palestinian Sovereignty,” *The New York Times*, December 24, 2000. Arab Christians in Iraq are experiencing the same problem from radical Muslims, according to press reports. See, “Christians Fear Persecution in New Iraq,” *The Washington Post*, July 27, 2004.

⁵⁷ Aumann, *Conflict & Connection*, p.229.

⁵⁸ *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary.htm>.

The following additional definitions are drawn from the *New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*:⁵⁹

Dispensationalism is the view that God has dealt differently with humanity during different eras or “dispensations” of biblical history. Each dispensation is “a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some *specific* revelation of the will of God,” according to its main exponent, Cyrus I. Scofield, who divided human history into seven dispensations: The Ages of Innocence (before the Fall of Adam); Conscience (from the Fall to Noah); Human Government (from Noah to Abraham); Promise (from Abraham to Moses); Law (from Moses to Jesus); Grace (the Church age); and Kingdom (the Millennium).

All Dispensationalists adhere to Pre-Millennialism – the belief in the Return of Christ to the earth to reign for a thousand years prior to the Great White Throne Judgment. However, not all pre-Millennialists are necessarily Dispensationalists, as is the case with the ICEJ.

Post-Millennialism believes that the Church will rule triumphant over the earth for a thousand years before the Second Advent and Last Day Judgment. This definition would include a relatively new Evangelical stream known as Dominionism or ‘Kingdom Now’ theology.

A-Millennialism believes that the Millennial era of Revelation 20 is allegorical in that the Church now enjoys victory through Calvary and Satan is already bound.

The following sections of this paper first set forth our conception of Biblical Zionism, based on Covenantal Theology, and then deal with some of the allegations leveled by our Replacement critics as well as some of the legitimate concerns they have raised about Dispensationalism.

SECTION 2

COVENANTAL THEOLOGY – THE FOUNDATION OF BIBLICAL ZIONISM

“To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.”

Ephesians 3:8-10

A. THE NATURE OF DIVINE COVENANT

Theologians have often referred to the great covenants of the Bible as the ‘golden thread’ running through all Scripture, telling the story of salvation history.⁶⁰ This

⁵⁹ J. D. Douglas, General Editor, *New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1978 Revised Edition.

⁶⁰ Note: Much of this section on Covenantal Theology is drawn from works by various theologians and Bible scholars, including:

concept includes God's covenants (*b'rit* in Hebrew) with Abraham, with Moses at Sinai, with King David and finally the New Covenant delivered in the life, ministry and atoning sacrifice of Jesus.

These divine Covenants are legally binding agreements, whereby God firmly commits Himself to do certain things or to act certain ways. The Apostle Paul tells us in Hebrews 6:13: "For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself." We also see this in the book of Genesis when God made a covenant *with Himself* after the flood, whereby He promised never to destroy every living thing again and set the seasons as we know them today in motion. In Genesis 8:21, we are told, "The Lord said to Himself..." He did not speak to a man or even an angel or some other created being. Only afterwards does He deliver the promise to Noah that He will never destroy the earth and all flesh again by flood, and He set the rainbow in the sky as the seal or outward sign of His inward pledge (Genesis 9:1-17). Later, we see that God equates this unilateral pledge to Noah to His covenantal love relationship with Israel, saying in Isaiah 54:9: "For this is like the days of Noah to me, when I swore that the waters of Noah should not flood the earth again."

The covenants of the Bible are thus a reflection of God's very nature and character as a faithful, loving God who cannot lie and thus can be totally trusted. In II Chronicles 6:14, King David tells us this is what sets God apart from all pretenders, saying: "O Lord, the God of Israel, there is no God like thee in heaven or on earth, keeping covenant and showing lovingkindness..." Numbers 23:19 says, "God is not a man that He should lie, nor a son of man that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will not make it good?" In Romans 3:3-4, Paul tells us – once again in connection with God's promises to Israel – that man's unbelief "will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar." And again in Hebrews 6:18, we are assured – in a direct reference to the Abrahamic covenant – that "it is impossible for God to lie."

Thus salvation history, God's redemptive plan for the whole world, is built upon the bedrock of God's very essence and character as a faithful, loving and sovereign God; His immutability or unchanging nature. He can be trusted to keep His word.

As this redemptive plan begins to unfold in the pages of Scripture, the first 11 chapters of Genesis give an account of the progressive fall of the entire human race.

Malcolm Hedding, *Understanding Israel*. Oklahoma City, OK: Zion's Gate International, 1989.

Malcolm Hedding, "A Biblical Perspective on the Restoration of Israel," Lecture series available from the ICEJ.

Derek Prince, *The Destiny of Israel and The Church*. UK: Derek Prince Ministries, 1999.

Halvor Ronning, "The Land of Israel: A Christian Zionist view" (Helsinki: ICEJ-Finnish Branch, undated).

James B. Walker, *Israel – Covenant and Land*. Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1986.

Marvin Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI and Center for Judaic Christian Studies, Dayton, OH, 1994.

There is the fall of the individual, the fall of the family, the fall of the clan, the fall of the tribe, the fall of the region, and finally the fall of the whole globe, leading to the flood. The lesson is clear: Man is lost without God and has no ability within himself to find his way back to God. Speaking of this fallen human nature in Romans, Paul tells us that the natural man does not desire the things of God neither can he (See Romans 1:18-32; Romans 7:18; Romans 8:7). Man needed to be rescued by God.⁶¹

God indeed had such a divine rescue plan already prepared before the worlds were made (Micah 5:2; Ephesians 1:3-6; I Peter 1:20), and it begins to play out before us some 4,000 years ago with the calling of Abraham. It is the story of a loving God who came looking for humanity.

B. THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT – THE COVENANT OF DECISION

In the mystery of the divine plan God chose, or ‘elected,’ the Hebrew patriarch Abraham for the purpose of world redemption, saying:

“Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

Genesis 12: 1-3

These words of promise are the origin of a covenant that constitutes God’s decision to redeem man, and it is based not on merit, but on grace alone. “This election to be an instrument of God’s redemptive activity on this earth neither implied nor had its basis in superiority, innate giftedness, or spiritual elitism. Rather, the concept of chosenness surrounding Abraham was a matter of pure grace. It was human *hesed* (“loyal love”) for God’s *hesed*.”⁶²

Thus it is commonly called the ‘Covenant of Decision’ (or ‘Covenant of Grace’), and it is the foundation stone of all salvation history. Each of the succeeding covenants of the Bible progressively build upon it or ‘add’ to it in some fashion (see Galatians 3:19). Thus understanding this covenant is crucial to grasping all other Scripture and indeed references to the Abrahamic Covenant appear extensively throughout all portions of the Bible – whether in the Torah, Writings, Prophets, Gospels or Epistles (e.g., Genesis 15ff; Deuteronomy 1:8; Joshua 24:3; I Chronicles 16:13-22; Psalm 105:6-15; Jeremiah 33:25-26; Luke 1:68-79; Acts 7:1-8; Hebrews 6:13-20). Essentially, it constitutes God’s decision to find a man through whom He could begin to work out His pre-ordained redemptive plan for the whole earth.

There are two aspects to the Abrahamic Covenant that are unique yet inseparable, and they have to do with *a people* and *a land*. The first facet is unconditional, unilateral, irrevocable and eternal, and that is God’s decision to redeem for Himself a people

⁶¹ Hedding, *Understanding Israel*; Hedding, “A Biblical Perspective.”

⁶² Wilson, *Our Father Abraham*, p. 257; Deuteronomy 7:6-8.

from the earth through the natural seed of Abraham.⁶³ No matter what Abraham and his descendants do in time, God pledges that He will bring ‘blessing’ or salvation to all the families of the earth through him. God does not put conditions on this promise, He does not rely on anyone else to perform it, He will not take it back, and it is eternal since salvation is eternal. God vows that He will redeem for Himself a people, and in the Bible that people will come to be known collectively as ‘Israel.’

The second facet of the Abrahamic Covenant has to do with the land then called Canaan, where Abraham was told to proceed. Abraham’s election and the election of this land came together⁶⁴ and to separate the two at any point nullifies the whole covenant and our very assurance of salvation, since it would render God a liar (Hebrews 6:13-18). It also is irrevocable and eternal, as vouched for in Scripture (e.g., Genesis 17:8; 48:4), but there are conditions placed on this aspect of the covenant. God – by His very nature and character – is not only faithful and trustworthy, but also righteous and just, and He sought to reveal these traits when promising to give the land to Abraham and his descendants. Some theologians today would refer to this as the ‘Palestinian’ covenant in deference to a commonly used name for the land over many more recent centuries, but the Bible employs the term *Eretz Israel* – the ‘Land of Israel’ – among other names (e.g., I Samuel 13:19).

This part of the Abrahamic Covenant has to do with possession of that land and is developed further in the Books of Moses. We are told in no less than 25 passages of Scripture that ultimately the land belongs to God and is a gift from Him.⁶⁵ But He makes very clear His intent to give it to Abraham and his natural seed of promise as an “everlasting possession.” (Genesis 13:15; 15:17-21; 17:5-8; Psalm 105:8-12; Galatians 3:15-18; Hebrews 6:13-20) Furthermore, the Scriptures provide several geographical descriptions of this particular land that – though the ‘meets-and-bounds’ are not always uniform – still leave the indelible impression it is a specific piece of earthly real estate and should never be converted into some spiritualized concept.⁶⁶

This means that He was giving a carefully chosen people ownership – in the nature of a trust – of a specifically chosen land, in order to provide a place to preserve them over time, that they might be better able to deliver into the world all the means of salvation.⁶⁷ The land was necessary because God knew no single person or generation would be faithful enough before Him to receive all these means, namely the covenants

⁶³ Hedding, *Understanding Israel*, pp. 35-50, citing Walvoord as concurring; Wilson, *Our Father Abraham*.

⁶⁴ Wilson, *Our Father Abraham*, p. 257, (citing Abraham J. Heschel, *Israel: An Echo of Eternity*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969).

⁶⁵ See, e.g., Leviticus 25:23; Deuteronomy 1:20, 25; 2:29; Wilson, *Our Father Abraham*, p. 260.

⁶⁶ Wilson, *Our Father Abraham*, p. 260; See, e.g., Genesis 15:18-21; Numbers 34:2-12; Deuteronomy 32:8; Joshua 15:1-12; Ezekiel 47:13-20. The ICEJ maintains that Jewish people have the right to live safe and securely anywhere in *Eretz Israel*, but will leave it to the State of Israel and its citizens to work out with their Arab neighbors where to draw their political borders. Ultimately, we believe Israel will come into possession of its full land inheritance under the promised Millennial reign of Messiah.

⁶⁷ Hedding, *Understanding Israel*, pp. 54-60; Wilson, *Our Father Abraham*, p. 260; On the ‘trust’ concept, see Walker, *Israel – Covenant and Land*, p. 9. Interestingly, many Palestinians now view the same land as a *waqf* or Islamic religious trust as well, to be held for future Muslim generations, thus rendering it non-negotiable.

of God, the Law of God, the Word of God, the service of God, the worship of God and finally the Messiah of God.⁶⁸

However, although Israel was granted title or right of possession to the land, the Bible is clear that God put conditions on their right to actually reside in the land and enjoy its benefits. These conditions are set forth in Deuteronomy 30 and elsewhere. Their title would never be revoked, but to live in the land and enjoy its full benefits, they would have to walk uprightly before Him, in obedience to His commands.

Faithfulness before Him would “enlarge” Israel’s borders and ensure peace in the land (Exodus 34:24; Leviticus 26:6; Deuteronomy 12:20), while disobedience would bring divine judgment in her borders (Ezekiel 11:7-12) and total rebellion would ultimately bring exile (*e.g.*, Deut. 28:63-68; Ezekiel 5:7-17). The land would even “spew you out,” says Leviticus 18:24-30, and then lie barren and unfruitful in their absence.

And yet at no point would loss of domicile mean loss of ownership.⁶⁹ Psalm 105:8-15 explains that it already belonged to Abraham and Isaac as an “everlasting... inheritance” while they were still “wanderers” and “too few in number” to truly possess it. And since this was an “oath” of God “commanded to a thousand generations,” the fact that the Jewish people have essentially lived in the *Diaspora* for the past two thousand years does not impair their underlying title before God. It merely reflects their breach of the conditions for residency.⁷⁰

By establishing this arrangement, God meant Israel to serve as a ‘light to the nations’ – a paradigm nation for all peoples; an example of what it means to walk before Him in faithfulness and thereby know His blessings or in disobedience and thereby know His loving correction. And in this manner, God would be able to reveal His upright and just character to the world.⁷¹

Israel thus was appointed a servant’s role for the purpose of birthing the means of redemption into the world, which would also require – as with every birth – some amount of suffering. It is not an easy thing to be God’s exemplar for the world, and it has required of them enormous pain and sorrow on our behalf.

Israel’s calling in this respect also meant that the adversary of God, called Satan in the Bible, would do everything he could to add to that suffering in an attempt to frustrate the divine plan of salvation. We see this from the very moment God sets out to confirm His covenant with Abraham, when “birds of prey” (symbolic of demonic forces) come to devour the sacrifices he had obediently laid out in order to seal the deal with shed blood (Genesis 15:11). We also see this elsewhere in the Bible right up to Revelation chapter 12, where a woman symbolizing Israel (she is clothed with the sun, moon and twelve stars in clear reference to Joseph’s dream of Genesis 37:9 and

⁶⁸ Hedding, “A Biblical Perspective”; See also Romans 3:2; 9:4.

⁶⁹ Hedding, *Understanding Israel*, p. 41; Hedding, “A Biblical Perspective”; Wilson, *Our Father Abraham*, p. 260; G. Douglas Young, “Israel: The Unbroken Line,” *Christianity Today*, October 6, 1978: p. 22.

⁷⁰ Hedding, “A Biblical Perspective”; Wilson, *Our Father Abraham*, pp. 259-260; Leviticus 26:44-45.

⁷¹ See, Letter of Archbishop of Canterbury Rev. Rowan Williams, “Holy Land and Holy People,” delivered to 5th International Sabeel Conference, quoted in Wilkinson, “Report on Sabeel Conference”; See also, Isaiah 49:5-6; 60:1-3.

the Patriarch Jacob, heir to the promises to Abraham) gives birth to a child (Messiah – v. 5) who “a great red dragon” (Satan – v. 9) seeks to devour. In the end, the woman flees to “her place” (v. 14) – a land ultimately meant to preserve her.

Sadly, we also can see this dark theme running throughout the pages of human history, and the unrivaled suffering of the Jewish people at the hands of depraved men.

C. THE MOSAIC COVENANT – THE COVENANT OF INSTRUCTION

In his evolving relationship with the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God chose another man, Moses, to deliver them from a foretold period of slavery and exile from the land of promise (Genesis 15:13-16) and to establish a second covenant with them. The Mosaic covenant is considered the ‘Covenant of Instruction,’ and was meant to further reveal God’s nature and character to man. He is faithful and just, as we have seen before, but He is also holy. Thus the Ten Commandments were placed in human hands as an expression of His holiness and glory.

The people and the land of the Abrahamic Covenant again are each made an inseparable part of the Mosaic Covenant. Out of 613 laws or commandments delivered to the new nation of Israel through Moses, nearly 300 could only be faithfully performed in the land of Israel and particularly at the Temple.⁷²

The Jewish people consider the giving of the Law at Sinai the birth of their national existence and a most crucial moment in their calling to be a “light to the nations” (Isaiah 49:6) and the divinely chosen channel for reconciling the world to the one, true God. Even to this day, Judaism sees at the heart of its mission this original vocation as the chosen purveyor of ethical monotheism to the world. Indeed, every generation since has been taught to conceive of themselves as also standing at the foot of Mt. Sinai and receiving the responsibility of obedience to the Law as a means to redeem or ‘mend’ the world (*tikkun olam* in Hebrew). It is akin to the Christian practice of closing one’s eyes to stand at the foot of the cross.

In Galatians 3, the Apostle Paul tells us that the Law or Mosaic Covenant was “added” (v. 19) to the Abrahamic Covenant for a specific purpose. In the election of Abraham, God decided to redeem man, but man still was not aware that he was lost. We needed to be instructed of our sinful nature and awakened to our desperate need for God, much like a speed sign must be erected to tell us when we are going too fast. Without the law, we would never have known when we had done wrong, and yet through it we are all shown our inadequacy to measure up to God’s holiness (Romans 4:15; 7:7). His offer of grace to all humanity through Abraham only could be fully appreciated if all humanity were shown our fallen nature. Thus, “the law is my tutor,” says Paul, and leads me to understand my need for a Redeemer (Galatians 3:24).

⁷² After the Second Temple was destroyed in 70 AD, the Sanhedrin moved to Yavneh and restructured the Jewish faith away from the centrality of Temple worship and focused instead on the synagogue system and Rabbinic Judaism as it has evolved until today. See, Wilson, *Our Father Abraham*, pp. 77-79.

Receiving the yoke of the Law, with its universal purpose of convicting the entire world of its sin, has only added to the sufferings of the Jewish people down through history. This goes beyond the reality of having to discipline one's life to fit into the Torah's tight moral code for the sake of the Gentile nations. To a watching world, they now are not only scorned as a supposedly 'chosen' people, but also constitute a constant reminder that we are all accountable before God. If all humanity is rebellious by nature, we certainly do not want to be constantly prompted of this fact by that peculiar people over there ever embracing the Torah. The effect has been the further rejection of the Jewish people, an object of derision by the very nations they were elected to benefit.⁷³

D. THE DAVIDIC COVENANT – THE COVENANT OF REWARD

The next covenant added to the Abrahamic Covenant centers on the promises made in II Samuel 7:5-16 and elsewhere to yet another carefully chosen servant, the shepherd boy who grew up to be ancient Israel's beloved King David. His desire to serve God and build a 'House' for the Lord in Jerusalem moved God to establish a further everlasting covenant with Israel. The House of David was promised an eternal throne that one day would rule over the whole earth from an Israel safe and securely planted forever in her own land ("in their own place" – II Samuel 7:10; cf. the Rev. 12:14 reference to the woman being preserved in "her place"). For all their toil and hardships in serving the Lord, the Law and the resentful world around them, the Jewish people were going to be rewarded one day by being made the unmistakable head of the nations as the ultimate testimony of the faithfulness of God (See also, Genesis 15:1; Deuteronomy 28:13; Isaiah 2:1-4; Jeremiah 3:17). David immediately understood this, rejoicing in the "awesome things" that God had promised for "Thy land, before Thy people." (II Samuel 7:23) Once again, the land promised to the people of Israel is made central and inseparable from a crucial covenant in God's overall plan for world redemption.

Expanding on the most decisive element in salvation history, the rewards promised in the Davidic Covenant include the assurance that from David's lineage, a Redeemer and Righteous Judge of the whole earth would some day come – the Messiah. His coming had been alluded to before (e.g., "I will raise up a prophet" after Moses, says Deuteronomy 18:18). David was of the tribe of Judah, which had already been told that this figure would arise from their ranks (Genesis 49:8-12 – "The scepter shall not depart from Judah"; also, I Chronicles 5:2; Micah 5:2). If grace was offered through the Abrahamic Covenant, while the Mosaic Covenant served to convict and condemn the world that we might know of our deep need for God, the Davidic Covenant reassures us that ultimately there will be someone to mediate our case before God, a righteous ruler worthy of judging the whole earth (Psalm 98:9; 110; Daniel 7:13-14).

E. THE NEW COVENANT – THE COVENANT OF ABILITY

The exact phrase *b'rit hadasha* or 'new covenant' appears only once in the Hebrew Bible, in Jeremiah 31:31, but other supportive verses can easily be cited from the

⁷³ Malcolm Hedding, "Anti-Semitism: The Basis of Immorality," lecture delivered at the Jerusalem Summit, October 12, 2003.

Tanakh (a Hebrew acronym for the Torah, Writings and Prophets) indicating that a further covenant would be added by God to complete His redemptive plan for all the earth (See *e.g.*, Isaiah 59:18-21; Jeremiah 32:40; Ezekiel 36:24-28). For Christians, the chosen servant through whom God would deliver this covenant can be none other than Jesus of Nazareth. We believe his life, ministry, death, burial and resurrection meet all the credentials set forth in the Hebrew Scriptures foretelling of a suffering servant from the natural seed of Abraham and David that would bring a final atonement for sin (Isaiah 53; Daniel 9:24-25; Matthew 1:1; Acts 3:18). Any remaining Messianic credentials based on promises of a kingly ruler who will bring abiding righteousness and peace over all the earth will be confirmed and established at His Second Coming.

The New Covenant or Testament is the ‘Covenant of Ability,’ meaning that faith in the atonement provided by the shed blood of Jesus enables one to receive forgiveness of sins and the grace or unmerited favor of God first offered through Abraham (Galatians 3:16). Writers of the New Testament, drawing upon the entire *Tanakh* as their source of authority, explain the ‘mystery’ behind the purpose of God from the beginning – to redeem not just the Jewish people, but all mankind through them (Romans 11: 25-26; 15:8-12; Galatians 3:8; 4:5-6; Ephesians 2:10-8; 3:8-9; also Deuteronomy 32:43; Matthew 12:21; Romans 3:29-30).

- Grace was offered to ‘all the families of the earth’ through the Abrahamic Covenant – faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus enables Gentiles to receive that grace by being “adopted” as “sons of Abraham” and “heirs of the promise” of blessing (salvation) made to him (Romans 4:1-16; Galatians 3:6-14, 29).
- The Mosaic Covenant convicted humanity of its sin – the sinless life of Jesus satisfied the requirements of the law, providing the way of release from condemnation and the ability within to obey the law *via* a “circumcised heart.” (Romans 2:29; 8:1-4; Colossians 2:11)
- The Davidic Covenant assured of a King and High Priest forever from his lineage who would mediate between God and His world – the perfect obedience of Jesus to His Father, even to the point of a cursed death on a tree, earned Him the right to take that exalted place as Righteous Ruler and Judge of the whole earth (Psalm 110; Ephesians 1:15-23; Philippians 2:5-11; Hebrews 5:5-10).

Thus we see the ‘threads’ of God’s salvation plan being worked out through His successive covenants, which all built upon previous covenants and did not abrogate or nullify any of them (Romans 2:1-4; Galatians 3:16-19). Indeed, theologically this can be considered ‘One Covenant of Grace’ for all humanity for all time.⁷⁴ Anyone before the cross is redeemed by looking forward in hope to the promised Redeemer (Job 19:25; Daniel 9:24-25; John 8:56; Galatians 3:8; Jude 4-14); while anyone afterwards looks back in faith at that finished work of atonement (Ephesians 2:11-16).

⁷⁴ Hedding, “A Biblical Perspective”; Hedding, *Understanding Israel*; Walker, *Israel – Covenant and Land*.

F. AN ENDURING LAND AND PEOPLE

Great tensions began developing, however, between the Jewish mainstream and the early followers of Jesus. Among the initial disagreements, the majority of Jews rejected the Messianic claims of Jesus espoused by his disciples, while many Gentiles started joining this stream of biblical faith without being circumcised.⁷⁵ In the second and third centuries AD, as Gentiles became dominant within the Church, the theory of Supersessionism took hold, insisting that – due to their rejection and crucifixion of Jesus and subsequent exile – the nation of Israel had been accursed forever and ‘replaced’ by the Church as God’s primary agent of redemption in the world. This theology has caused untold harm to the Jews over many centuries of the Church age and persists to this day.

Replacement theologians maintain that the people of the covenants of Israel have been replaced by the Church, which is now called to ‘possess’ new spiritual planes in lieu of the earthly covenant land. Through a misreading of biblical history, they generally hold that the two exiles and returns foretold in the Hebrew prophets (see Isaiah 11:11) were already completed by the time of Jesus and thus the last two thousand years of Jewish exile is a permanent ‘casting off.’⁷⁶

Thus it is important to determine from within the New Testament itself what happened to the covenant people and the covenant land from the Old Testament. Are they both still there? And are they the same? For this we turn to Paul again, a “steward of the mysteries of God.” (I Corinthians 4:1)

I. A HIDDEN PEOPLE

Even in Paul’s day, before the exile of 70 AD, the argument was already circulating that the rejection of Jesus by most of Israel meant that God had disinherited the nation from the covenants. He specifically refutes this notion that the older covenant ‘people’ disappear in at least five passages:

- 1) Romans 3:2 tells us the “unbelief” of some “will not nullify the faithfulness of God” to His promises;
- 2) Romans 11:1-2 states plainly that “God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew”;
- 3) Galatians 3:15-17 says a newer covenant does not “invalidate” or “nullify” an older one;
- 4) II Timothy 2:13 has Paul saying of his fellow Israelites, “If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself”; and
- 5) Hebrews 6:13-18 ‘strongly encourages’ those under the New Covenant to consider their own promise of salvation as secure by looking at God’s absolute faithfulness to His promises to Abraham and his natural seed.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Wilson, *Our Father Abraham*; Note this book contains an excellent treatment on the origins of the historic breach between Judaism and Christianity.

⁷⁶ See, Merkley, *Christian Attitudes Towards The State Of Israel*, pp.119-121, 187-190; Wilson, *Our Father Abraham*, p. 264.

⁷⁷ Some Bible commentators point out that God actually sought earlier opportunities to totally reject Israel for its unbelief and start over with a new people, yet He relented and remained faithful to His covenant promises. See

But where does that leave us Gentiles? In Galatians 6:16, Paul uses the novel phrase “the Israel of God” in reference to the believing Church. Yet elsewhere he explains that Gentile believers do not replace Israel but enlarge her. Gentiles are being added or “grafted into” the existing natural olive tree of Israel, according to Romans 11:17-21; while in Ephesians 2:11-22 we who were once “excluded from the commonwealth of Israel” are being “brought near” or included through Jesus, now “fellow citizens... in God’s household.” Thus we are considered one people, one tree, one commonwealth, one house, one family, all sons of Abraham, and Jesus confirms this by saying he has “other sheep” to bring into the “one flock with one Shepherd.” (John 10:16) Looking back at the crucifixion, John was to later comment that Jesus was meant to die “not for the nation only, but that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.” (John 11:51-52; see also Acts 2:39)

Furthermore, in Ephesians 3:4-6 the hidden “mystery of Christ [Messiah]... is that the Gentiles should be the fellow heirs of the same body” – meaning we join the already existing people of Israel. Finally, Romans 15:8-10 indicates that it was God’s plan all along that the Gentiles might “rejoice... with His people,” citing Deuteronomy 32:43.

Some would still point out that Galatians 3:28 maintains there is now “neither Jew nor Greek... for you are all one in Christ,” and that Jew and Gentile have been made “one new man” in Him (Ephesians 2:15) – again suggesting the Jews have somehow disappeared. But these verses were dealing with prejudices that had arisen and the feelings of some Gentile believers at that time that they were second-class citizens when around Jews. Being uncircumcised, for instance, they could not enter the court of the altar at the Temple, and Paul wanted to assure them that, spiritually speaking, Jesus had “broke down... the dividing wall” in the Temple courts and given them full and equal access into His presence (Ephesians 2:14). In no way could it mean that Jewish believers were no longer Jews in the flesh, since Galatians 3:28 also says there is “neither male nor female... in Christ” and the last time my believing wife and I checked, we were still male and female.

Indeed, natural Israel has survived under the New Covenant because of its future destiny – they are still rightful heirs in the flesh of promises made to Abraham. Paul actually makes clear this distinction in Romans 15:8-9, saying:

“For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision [Jews] on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises made to the fathers, and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy.”

In other words, while salvation is now available to the Gentiles by virtue of the mercies of God, the natural Jew carries within the covenantal promises received by Abraham and the Patriarchs of a future redemption for their people in their land in the fullness of time. Even though some may get ‘broken off’ along the way, the promise is still passed on by intestate succession until fulfilled.⁷⁸

Numbers 14:12-16, where Moses intercedes for Israel by appealing to God on the still relevant truth that His name and reputation among the nations are at stake when it comes to Israel. See, Wilson, *Our Father Abraham*, p. 258.

⁷⁸ Throughout the Bible, great emphasis is placed on ‘seed,’ birthrights and lineages, especially in the context of tracing how the bundle of spiritual rights and benefits are passed down through Abraham to his descendants. In Hebrews 7:6, we learn that the High Priest of God, Melchizedek, blessed Abraham because he “possessed the

This then is the “mystery” of Romans 11:25-27 and the one family or people that God purposed aforetime to call out for Himself from the earth: Natural Israel has remained intact – collectively in exile for so long but still awaiting the glorious culmination of God’s eternal promises to her (and individually in belief or unbelief), while the Church is called to go harvest the nations with the Gospel so that Gentiles might be added to the inclusive ‘Israel of God’ – and thus “all Israel will be saved.”⁷⁹

Therefore we find that the ‘people’ of the older covenants have made it into the New Testament, with Gentiles now being adopted in as full sons through the Messiah. In this regard, it is interesting to note that the Catholic Church and many Protestant denominations are finally seeking to come to terms today with the continuing existence alongside the Church of ‘our elder brothers’ the Jews, who they also deem to enjoy some type of abiding covenantal relationship with God. Much of this re-thinking was triggered, of course, by the return of Israel as a nation onto the world scene in 1948, thereby confounding long-held doctrines about the Jews being cursed to endless wandering.⁸⁰

II. A HIDDEN LAND

However, that same physical restoration of Israel to her ancient homeland in our day has resulted in a prolonged armed conflict with her Arab neighbors that has produced great suffering and loss, particularly for the Palestinians. For adherents of Replacement or Liberation Theology who are sympathetic to the Palestinian cause and their grievances against Israel, the heart of their Scriptural argument against Christian Zionism is this: The New Testament is ‘silent’ about any modern-day return to the ‘land’ of Israel and thus Christians have scant biblical basis on which to support politically the secular State of Israel in the face of its current great ‘injustices’ against the Palestinian people.⁸¹

promises” (*Amplified Bible*), meaning he carried them within. Paul also explains in this chapter that the Levitical priesthood essentially paid tithes to Melchizedek because they were already in the “loins” of Abraham (Hebrews 7:8-10).

As a former practicing real estate attorney, this author would want to know where the title to the land, given to Abraham’s descendants as an ‘everlasting possession,’ is documented. Normally, a deed of title is a written document signed by a grantor with a property description, words of conveyance and express warranties, and it is valid and binding as between the grantor and grantee. But one must place it on the public land records to put others on notice as to ownership. In the instance of God’s covenant promises with Abraham, it would be proper to say that the repository of title to the land as an ‘everlasting possession’ was in the loins of Abraham, while the Bible is the record that puts the world on notice of that agreement. Thus, even though Paul constructs a rabbinic argument in Galatians 3:16 to say that Christ alone was the ‘seed’ who fulfilled the promises to Abraham regarding salvation by faith, the title to the land and the promise of a future redemption for the Jewish people are still ‘carried’ inside the natural descendants of Abraham and passed down by intestate succession (without a will) even by those in unbelief.

⁷⁹ Both components of ‘Israel’ were foreknown by God (Romans 11:2; I Peter 1:1-2). Flowing from all these biblical truths, the ICEJ simply cannot endorse Dispensationalist teachings, such as different ways of salvation in preceding ages, that the Church was an after-thought of God following Jewish rejection of Jesus, or that it is a ‘parenthesis’ in time. For this and other reasons, it is erroneous and misleading for anyone to associate us with Dispensationalist thinking.

⁸⁰ Moshe Aumann, *Conflict & Connection: The Jewish-Christian-Israel Triangle*. Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing, 2003.

Engaged in dialogue, some of these pro-Palestinian Christians might possibly concede some type of mass spiritual ‘ingathering’ into the Church of physically dispersed Jews in the last days, given Romans 11. But any notion that this could also encompass the physical restoration of unbelieving Jews to the land under current circumstances raises all kinds of doctrinal, political, historical and moral quandaries for them and their views of God Himself.⁸²

Since Replacement Theology maintains that the two expected Jewish exiles and returns were both completed by the time Jesus was born, all manner of prophecies about an end-day ingathering and exaltation of Israel in her land are then interpreted to have been fulfilled during his mission on earth and the subsequent birth and ‘triumph’ of the Church. Some point to one of the rare New Testament references to ‘land’ in a beatitude of Jesus that promises the ‘meek shall inherit the earth’ – taken by some to mean the Church inheriting the cosmos.⁸³

As an adherent to this line of thinking, the reformer Martin Luther was once asked whether the Jews of his time were still the descendants of Abraham, and he answered: “If the Jews are Abraham’s descendants, then we would expect them to be back in their own land... But do we see that? We see them living scattered and despised.”⁸⁴

So what would Luther do with today’s reality of over 5.5 million Jews now physically living back in their national homeland? If it is not part of a promised restoration, is it simply a political fluke, not to mention morally untenable?

The late Derek Prince once said, “To pass off the restoration of Israel as a political accident is like believing the world is flat!”⁸⁵ Nevertheless, in a revived form of second century Marcionism⁸⁶ we are demanded to show proof from the New Testament alone that the world is truly round.

⁸¹ See, e.g., Chapman, “God’s Covenant – God’s Land?”; John Hubers, “Christian Zionism: A Historical Analysis and Critique,” posted at <http://www.rca.org/images/mission/mideast/christianzionism.pdf>; Stephen Sizer, “Christian Zionism: Justifying Apartheid in the Name of God,” *Living Stones Magazine*, issues 19 & 20; Sizer, “Dispensationalism Examined Politically.”

⁸² See comments by Edmond Lee Browning reported in Solheim, “Jerusalem Conference”; discussion between Gary Burge and Michael Prior reported in Wilkinson, “Report on Sabeel Conference.”

⁸³ See, Chapman, “God’s Covenant – God’s Land?”, pp. 1-2; Stephen Sizer, “An Alternative Theology of the Holy Land: A Critique of Christian Zionism,” *The Churchman*, June 1999, posted at <http://www.virginiawater.co.uk/christchurch/articles/churchmanland.HTM>.

⁸⁴ Ronning, “The Land of Israel,” p. 11.

⁸⁵ Hedding, *Understanding Israel*, p. 19.

⁸⁶ Marcion was an early Gentile believer who was excommunicated for teaching that the Church should no longer consider the Old Testament as authoritative in light of the New. The New Testament, however, rests fully upon the Old and is in essence a first-hand historical account and Jewish commentary on the *Tanakh* explaining the Messianic credentials of Jesus. Furthermore, when Paul says in II Timothy 3:16 that, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness,” the Scripture he was referring to at that time was the Hebrew Bible. See, Wilson, *Our Father Abraham*, pp. 107-115.

First, it is instructive to note that the Old Testament is equally ‘silent’ on the ‘church.’ Never does such a word appear in the *Tanakh*, and since it also has been so important in God’s overall redemptive plan, we must account for it somehow in a future prophetic sense.⁸⁷

Replacement Theology has historically compensated for the silence on the church in Hebrew Scripture by selectively replacing ‘Church’ for ‘Israel’ when reading the Old Testament – co-opting all the verses of ‘blessing; to itself while leaving a ‘cast off’ Israel stuck with all the ‘curse’ passages.⁸⁸ But the writers of the New Testament had a different approach.

If you search the *Tanakh*, you will find many references to the *goyim*, meaning the Gentile ‘nations’ in the context of having a future place with the people of Israel, some of which we have already seen. The ‘Song of Moses’ in Deuteronomy chapter 32 has been said to hold the DNA of history, where God sets forth His overall plan for Israel and the nations. It indicates that God intends for history to end with the “Gentiles... rejoicing with His people,” (v. 43) and Paul repeatedly cites Old Testament verses concerning the ‘nations’ as being fulfilled in the believing Gentiles joining the Church (e.g., Romans 15:9-12 cites Psalm 18:49, Deuteronomy 32:43; Psalms 117:1 and Isaiah 11:10 in succession; see also the ‘Song of Moses’ in Revelation 15:3-4). So the church is there abundant times, and the New Testament writers knew how to find it.⁸⁹

Returning to our question, there happen to be several references to the ‘land’ of Israel in the New Testament, including in Stephen’s sermon before martyrdom in Acts 7:3 and 5. Mary and Joseph also are told by an angel of the Lord to bring the child Jesus back from Egypt and into the “land of Israel.” (Matthew 2:20-21) It was no accident that Jesus lived his life in the land, otherwise he would never have been able to satisfy all the law and thereby qualify as the perfect Lamb of God sacrificed for the sins of the world.⁹⁰

But is there no direct New Testament reference to some future restoration to the land? One answer given by some Bible scholars is that the presence of Israel in the land is assumed right through the New Testament, especially considering that most of its books had already been completed before Israel was exiled in 70 AD.⁹¹

⁸⁷ A new Hebrew word was actually developed for the followers of Jesus – *notzrim* – taken from the name of his hometown of Nazareth, which meant “little branch.” That name was originally derived from “Branch,” a special name used several times in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Zechariah for the kingly Messiah, who one day will rule from Jerusalem over all the earth (Isaiah 2:2-4; 4:2; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; Zechariah 6:12).

⁸⁸ Wilson, *Our Father Abraham*, pp. 96-98.

⁸⁹ Jesus was the first to use the word ‘church,’ saying in Matthew 16:18 that this corporate body would be built upon the confession revealed to Peter (v. 16) that He was “the Christ, the Son of the living God.” The late Prof. David Flusser, considered the leading Jewish Orthodox expert on the Second Temple era and Early Christianity, says the church was intended by Jesus to be a dynamic ‘movement’ made up of His disciples or followers, who were called to be ‘fishers of men’ and were entrusted with ever spreading the Kingdom of God. David Flusser, *Jesus*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1997: p. 111.

⁹⁰ Walker, *Israel – Covenant and Land*, p. 7.

⁹¹ Walker, *Israel – Covenant and Land*, p. 7.

Another answer is that the shared hope of a future ‘restoration’ to the land is invoked everywhere by New Testament writers and figures, including Jesus, steeped in the rabbinic methods of teaching disciples and speaking to those in other rabbinic circles. Since there were no printers, pocket Bibles or Internet concordances in those days, and not even the convenience of numbered chapters and verses, the prevailing teaching method required that Torah students memorize entire books or ‘scrolls’ of the *Tanakh* so that as a rabbi taught, he could mention one sentence, phrase or concept and the student instantly knew the *context* of the entire passage by heart. The rabbi could say ‘dry bones,’ for example, and everyone started scanning Ezekiel 37 in their minds. Rabbis also developed special ways of communicating with each other, and while most always cited prior Sages as their source of authority, Jesus often turned heads by drawing directly on the authority of “My Father.”⁹²

A prime example of Jesus using the rabbinic method comes from Luke 19:46 when he upset the Temple priests by saying, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a House of Prayer,’ but you have turned it into a ‘den of thieves.’” The first phrase comes from Isaiah 56:7 and speaks of the Temple’s high universal calling as “a house of prayer for all peoples,” while the latter was taken from Jeremiah 7:11, which in turn harkens back to God’s destruction of the Tabernacle at Shiloh due to the thievery of the sons of Eli (I Samuel 4). The Sadducees instantly knew that Jesus had just predicted a divine judgment on their Temple livelihood.⁹³

This rabbinic methodology must be kept in mind going forward, since it was used routinely by Jesus and the Apostles to focus attention on the entire context of any passage cited from the Old Testament, helping the hearer (or reader today) understand their treatment of its importance and whether it should be taken literally or figuratively. One must find the passage cited, look for where the entire passage begins and ends and only then start to grapple with their use of it. Sometimes our chapters today contain more than one distinct passage, while others run on into the next chapter. For instance, the well-known prophetic passage of Isaiah 53 actually starts in chapter 52:7. In this way we are “rightly handling” or “rightly dividing” (KJV) the word of truth (II Timothy 2:15). As we shall see, there are numerous such references to land, including the common belief – based on the promises in the Davidic Covenant (II Samuel 7) – in an ultimate ‘restoration’ of an Israelite kingdom equal to or exceeding the reigns of David and Solomon.⁹⁴

⁹² There is much solid Christian scholarship being developed today concerning the ‘Jewishness’ of Jesus and His unique, ‘authoritative’ rabbinic style (see Matthew 7:29; 21:23-27; Mark 1:22; Luke 4:32). The prevailing rabbinic method of Jesus’ day is described in John R. W. Stott, *Christian Counter Culture: The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*. Downe’s Grove: IVP, 1978: p. 214. See also, Flusser, *Jesus*: David Bivin and Roy Blizzard, *Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus*. Austin, TX: Center for Judaic-Christian Studies, 1984; Bradford H. Young, *The Jewish Background to the Lord’s Prayer*. Austin, TX: Center for Judaic-Christian Studies, 1984; and J. Julius Scott, Jr., “The Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament: Second Commonwealth Judaism in Recent Study,” posted at http://www.wheaton.edu/DistanceLearning/SCJ%20in%20Recent%20Study.htm#_ednref34. We also note here this expanding body of works on the ‘Jewishness’ of Jesus includes contributions by such Bible scholars as Dr. R. Steven Notley, Dr. Dwight Pryor and Dr. Randall Smith, *et al.*

⁹³ Flusser, *Jesus*, p. 138.

⁹⁴ The Jewish hope in “restoration” of the kingdom was so prevalent in those days that the words “the redemption of Zion” or “the freedom of Zion” were even imprinted on many Judean coins in the First Century. Flusser, *Jesus*, p. 243 (citing, E. Schürer, *History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, (revised and edited by G. Vermes *et al.*, Edinburgh, Vol. 1, 1973: pp 605-606).

G. THE COVENANTS AND THE MINISTRY OF THE PROPHETS

Additionally, it is necessary to understand the relationship between the covenants of God and the complementary nature of the ministry of the Hebrew prophets. We already have seen that both the land and people of Israel are integral and inseparable within the Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic covenants. Thus any New Testament references to the covenants or ‘promises made to the fathers’ – meaning the Patriarchs – necessarily include the land. It is not implied or inferred, it is intrinsic, since the land is subsumed or embedded into the terms of the covenants due to its central role in furthering the redemptive plan and purpose of God.⁹⁵ Abraham was promised not only a ‘seed’ to bless the whole earth, but also the physical land of Israel as an ‘everlasting possession,’ and the covenant with David confirmed this! We will see that the first coming of Messiah fulfilled the first promise (Galatians 3:16), while His Second Coming will ensure the latter.

When one reads from the Hebrew prophets – with their interspersed mix of poetry, fury, compassion and despair – the key to understanding their ministry is to realize that every utterance has to fit within the terms, conditions and contours of the divine covenants already established with Israel. God is not a man that He should lie or change His mind. He will not derogate from that which He has vowed within Himself to do. And thus there has to be a consistent plot line that is carrying out the redemptive purpose hidden in the covenants of God but later revealed to the New Testament Apostles as stewards of the mysteries of God (Ephesians 3:12).

Put simply, the prophets are there to serve the covenants; the prophecies must confirm or ‘flow’ within the promises. Thus we have already seen Paul say that Jesus as well “came to confirm the promises made to the fathers.” (Romans 15:8) Later Bible prophecies expound on the covenantal promises and give us some sense of how God will perform them over time, but it is the promises themselves that are the “anchor” of our hope (Hebrews 6:19).

The ministry of the Hebrew prophets was given to keep the land and the people of Israel together in the timings of God in order to serve His overall plan for world redemption. The words of warning and doom flowed from the prophets’ anguish that Israel was in severe breach of the conditions God had placed on their right to reside in the land. Yet their accompanying poetic joy was in realization that God nevertheless was duty bound to return them to the land again one day because of His solemn oath to Abraham, and confirmed to David as a reward. For in order to eventually wind up back in the land permanently, the cycle must go ‘scatter and return,’ not ‘return and then scatter.’ Thus at nearly every point that the prophets speak of exilic judgment, they also sound the hope of return.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Walker, *Israel – Covenant and Land*, p.7.

⁹⁶ Wilson, *Our Father Abraham*, p. 260; Flusser, *Jesus*, p. 241.

“For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you,” says Isaiah. ““In an outburst of anger I hid My face from you for a moment: But with everlasting lovingkindness I will have compassion on you,” says the Lord your Redeemer.” (54:7-8)

Jesus also ‘flowed’ within the covenants when setting out his prophetic insights in the familiar passage of Luke 21:24 that His people “will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles *until* the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”

Here Jesus warns of the coming exile that began in 70 AD and yet gives hope of a subsequent ingathering in the very same breath, invoking Daniel’s insights into the sweep of Gentile history (chapter 2), which also ends when all the Jewish exiles from Jerusalem are finally complete (Daniel 9:16, 24).

How did he derive this? Daniel knew from the scroll sent by Jeremiah (25:11; 29:10) to the exiles in Babylon that they had 70 years before they could begin to return (Daniel 9:2). And yet he is not satisfied with that answer and starts fasting and repenting before God for the sins of his people, because he wanted to know when *all* their exiles and *all* the desolations of Jerusalem would be over. The answer comes from heaven in Daniel 9:20-27, and Jesus treats the end of the “seventy weeks” of appointed desolations for Jerusalem as corresponding to the last of the Gentile kingdoms of Chapter 2.⁹⁷

Paul likewise gives hope of a final return when referencing this same marker from Daniel 2 in Romans 11, saying that a “scattering” and “partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.” He draws his imagery of scattering and ingathering from Isaiah 6:9-13 as well, which speaks of a blindness and unbelief pronounced by God over Israel that ends as the *physical* scattering of His people ends and they begin to come back – a return that is unto redemption.

“Lord, how long?” Isaiah pleads when he is told of the “dull eyes” and “deaf ears” he must proclaim over his people. “Until cities are devastated... the land is utterly desolate...” That is, until the scattering is complete and a final ingathering begins.

Otherwise, how is it that Paul opens his Romans 9-11 discourse in such despair over the fate of his own people and yet ends on such a note of elation for them and amazement at “the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” (11:33)

⁹⁷ There are, of course, many theories attempting to unlock the meaning of Daniel 9 and calculate the span of the “seventy weeks,” including a serious effort by the brilliant Sir Isaac Newton in his 1,000-page commentary on the book of Daniel. Newton posed that the seventy weeks (7 x 70 = 490 years) were the number of years during the overall Gentile age in which the Jews would actually be back in Jerusalem and administering sacrifices at the Temple. Any time in exile did not count towards the seventy weeks – it was a ‘time out.’ Thus, most of those ‘weeks’ would have been ticked off by the time of the Second Temple’s destruction and only a few still remain.

What we can conclude is this:

- Jeremiah 16:14-18 promises *one* amazing Israelite return to the land in the end days from all the corners of the world that eclipses in magnitude the Exodus that came out of Egypt.
- After the Exodus, history has seen Israel exiled twice from her land – in 586 BC to Babylon under the siege of Nebuchadnezzar, and again beginning in 70 AD to all the nations of the earth under the Roman legions of Titus.
- The first scattering to Babylon was followed by only a partial ingathering (in Ezra and Nehemiah) and was intended by God to render Israel in unbelief at the first coming of Messiah, so that the Gospel might go out to the nations (Romans 11:11-12; Galatians 4:4).
- The second scattering and dispersion to all nations and then a second, final ingathering foretold in Isaiah 11:11 and Jeremiah 16:14-18 are intended by God to bring Israel into belief, and thereby summon Messiah's return.
- Thus the period of unbelief actually spans from the initial exile to Babylon (Isaiah 6:9-13) all the way through until the end of the Gentile age foreseen in Daniel chapter 2, a span that corresponds to Daniel 9.

Jesus mirrors this in Matthew 23:37-39, saying “Jerusalem, Jerusalem... Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord!’” This traditional Hebrew greeting that developed at the three main biblical feasts in Jerusalem in expectation of the Messiah is lifted from Psalm 118:26. Those hearing him would have known that only four verses earlier it is said: “The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone.” (Psalm 118:22)

Acts 3:18-20 bears this out as well, as the Apostle Peter tells his countrymen that the Jesus they crucified “in ignorance” had fulfilled all that “God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets that His Christ would suffer,” but that this same Jesus – now glorified and ascended – must be retained⁹⁸ in heaven until all the other promises and prophecies of the final “restoration” of Israel are fulfilled.

We are led to understand from such passages as Ezekiel 36:24-28 that this final process of restoration for Israel involves a physical ingathering in unbelief to the land and “then” a spiritual ingathering unto the Lord. This is an irreversible process, since we are promised that there will never be another exile (Amos 9:15; Isaiah 11:11). In so doing, God will vindicate His Word and His Messiah before the nations, as well as His election of the people and land of Israel for the sake of world redemption. It is a sure promise rooted in the covenants of God, and thereafter vouched for by His prophets.

So we find that in the New Testament the land of Israel is still there. It has not gone anywhere, and has been awaiting the return of its rightful Jewish owners all these

⁹⁸ The word “retained” is used in the original Greek in Acts 3:21 – Hedding, “A Biblical Perspective.” The NIV Bible says: “He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything.” Peter bases much of his sermon in Acts 3 on Hosea 5:14 - 6:1-3. One can clearly see a reference to the thought of being “retained in heaven” in the words, “I will go away and return to My place until they acknowledge their guilt.” Peter restates, “He will come to us like the rain” as “times of refreshing from the Lord.”

centuries. Some Christians have tried to project the land into some heavenly realm while identifying with the earthly figure of Jesus, when in fact it is the exact opposite: Jesus is glorified and in heaven right now and the land has not budged one inch. That land may seem secondary compared to the eternal things of salvation, yet it nonetheless remains a necessary element of God's plan to help bring the Jews and the world into the Messianic reign.

How so many in the Church have not been able to see this in the pages of God's Word down through the centuries indeed rises to the level of a biblical 'mystery' in itself, and even more so in the contemporary light of the lingering and often hostile Christian opposition to Israel's restored presence in the land of her forefathers. Isaiah "beckons" to the Gentiles to help carry the exiles home (49:22), and yet it falls on far too many dull eyes and deaf ears. It would seem, therefore, that the God who foreordained a veiled understanding over Israel in their reading of Moses (II Corinthians 3:14) for the sake of Gentile salvation, has also purposely left many 'arrogant' believing Gentiles – as Paul saw them – with a profound blind spot as to their own Scriptures and its confirmation of the "irrevocable" calling and election of the land and people of Israel as the agents through which to express His great love for all humankind (Romans 11:29). The shameful testimony of Christian maltreatment of the Jews over two Millennia surely bears witness to this. It should humble us all.

Yet is it not the purpose of God that all the redeemed of the Lord would enter eternity without any person, people, nation or church ever being able to "boast" that we truly did anything or were in any way responsible for the salvation of the world (Ephesians 2:8-9). Otherwise it would not be grace. Does not Paul tell us that, "God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all." (Romans 11:32) In the end it is clear – **God did it all**. He made a unilateral offer of grace to all men through Abraham, who as the first man called a 'prophet' in the Bible, saw clearly in the binding of Isaac that "God will provide for Himself the lamb" for sacrifice (Genesis 22:8).

SECTION 3

ENTERING THE LAND – THE QUESTION OF JUSTICE

"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

Micah 6:8

A. STAKING OUT A POSITION

Having established that our Biblical Zionism is founded upon Covenantal Theology and the sure mercies, promises and election of God, it remains necessary to apply these truths and principles to the conflict over the land unfolding before us today. The Jewish people were promised a final restoration to "your own land" (Ezekiel 37:14), but are they fulfilling today the conditions for residency on the land set forth in the Torah and illuminated by the Hebrew prophets.

Some Christians would contend that Israel is in unbelief and in breach of the covenant terms, and thus might only be entitled to come back once in faith. Others have gone

further, coupling Replacement views with humanistic mores of the international community – often applied in a discriminatory manner against Israel – in order to brand Zionism a form of racism, apartheid and even ethnic cleansing. Thus, we already have seen how Christian Zionist support for Israel has been deemed by some to be a heretical belief in a ‘militaristic’ God capable of ordering genocide.

On the other hand, many fellow Christians have made determined political stands for Israel’s immediate right to all the land and vigorously opposed international efforts and even peace initiatives accepted by a great many Israelis to resolve the conflict by dividing the land. The basis of their support often rests on schemes of prophetic interpretation that do not take into account the conditional nature of Biblical Zionism, and thus risks lapsing into ‘political’ Zionism.

We stake out a unique position based on an understanding of the covenantal relationship of God with His people as well as an understanding of the timings and seasons of God, which are meant to accomplish the purpose of His redemptive plan.⁹⁹

B. A TIME OF FAVOR

God has entered into an eternal love relationship with Israel. Thus, even when she sins and rebels against Him, she remains the “Apple of His eye” and beloved “for the sake of the Fathers.” (Zechariah 2:8, Romans 11:28) His love for her is so great and persistent that in the end, He will save and bring her to Himself even if it means doing it by judgment, affliction and “fury poured out.” He is a jealous God! (Ezekiel 20:33-35)

The Bible divulges that there are appointed times and seasons of God tied to His passionate relationship with Israel and redemptive purposes for the world. The Psalmist declared, “You will arise and have mercy on Zion; for the time to favor her, Yes, the set time, has come.” (102:13) Daniel also was given to understand that certain times – or “weeks” in biblical terminology – had been “appointed” before the destructions of Jerusalem and the exiles of his people were accomplished (Daniel 9:22-24). Jesus was born in “the fullness of time” (Galatians 4:4) – when Israel would not recognize him – and he likewise affirmed that there are set “times and seasons” that are in God’s hands alone (Acts 1:7).

In Israel’s history, there have been times of favor and times of disfavor, and they can clearly be discerned over time by simply determining whether they are in the process of being exiled by God as a loving, corrective measure or gathered according to His great mercies. “O Lord, You showed favor to Your land; You restored the captivity [fortunes] of Jacob,” says Psalm 85:1. (See also, Psalm 14:7; 77:7; 106; 126:1; Jeremiah 30:18, 33:25-26 ; Ezekiel 39:25; Hosea 6:11; Joel 3:1).

It was these times of favor or ‘restoration’ for Israel that Jesus and the disciples alluded to in Acts 1:6-7, when Jesus says they themselves should not be concerned with the nation’s fate at that moment, but instead concentrate on preaching the

⁹⁹ We consider our position as not a ‘middle way’ or a ‘third way,’ but the ‘Apostolic way,’ meaning that which the earliest Church fathers believed and taught.

Gospel. For he knew it was a time of disfavor and that a scattering or exile was soon coming meant to bring “riches for the Gentiles.” (Luke 21:20-24; Romans 11:12)

And yet, the Apostle Peter is able to stand in that same Jerusalem not many days hence and boldly declare that the “times of restoration of all things” spoken of “by the mouth of His holy prophets” will indeed come before Messiah returns (Acts 3:21). In so doing, we see that Peter’s preaching of the Gospel included a marked hope in that future time of favor and final ingathering for Israel.

Such a time is easily discernible in our day, as nearly half the world’s Jews have returned and now dwell in the land.¹⁰⁰ Thus we can conclude it is a time of God’s favor, and that is not without reference to the Holocaust and current conflict. God can indeed begin to gather Israel in unbelief when His purpose is to bring them into belief, and Paul clearly proclaims that this ingathering is destined to bring “life from the dead” for them and for the world (Romans 11:15).

Therefore in a time of divine favor and ingathering for Israel, it is unacceptable for sincere Christians to invoke the call of the Hebrew prophets for ‘justice’ when the heart intent is to hinder that process or even thwart it. To be faithful to the covenants and the prophets who served them, we can and should make such calls but only with the motivation of truly desiring to see Israel reach her divine destiny once back in the land. Otherwise, we are using her own prophets as just another dart against her. In this same vein, the Jesus who wept to ‘gather’ Jerusalem unto Himself also counseled us that, “he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.” (Matthew 12:30) There is no neutral ground on this for the Church and we must have the heart of the Gentile convert Ruth, who accompanied Naomi home from exile to help restore her to her portion and place in the land.

C. TIMELESS CONDITIONS

Even though she is being gathered, Israel’s right to dwell on the “Beautiful Land” or “glory of all lands” (Daniel 11:41; Ezekiel 20:6) is nevertheless still regulated by her faithfulness and obedience to her God. The fact that the land is hers by divine delegation does not mean in and of itself that she has the right to live on all of it at this time. To enjoy this privilege she must be in a reconciled relationship with her God (Ezekiel 36:24-26). Throughout history, failure in this regard has meant judgment, loss of domicile and great sorrows (Jeremiah 9:17-24). God “swore” to give her the whole land, but He was never able to place it entirely in her hands due to disobedience (Nehemiah 9:15). Our reading of the Bible leads us to believe this will only be fully realized in the Messianic kingdom.

Until then, the covenantal conditions on the land still apply. Israel is striving with her God and though her spiritual condition might demand judgment and renewed exile, God in His grace has determined to redeem her, instead of exiling her again (Amos 9:15; Isaiah 11:11; Jeremiah 24:6). This redemption, according to Scripture, will involve a process of affliction aimed at repentance (Hosea 5:14 - 6:1-3) and not

¹⁰⁰ According to the latest figures from the Jewish Agency, published in *The Jerusalem Post* on September 14, 2004, Israel is home to 5.5 million Jews, constituting 40% of the world’s 13 million Jews. Another 5.6 million live in North America, over a million in Western Europe and 400,000 in the former Soviet republics.

annihilation, as some Christians maintain. The pressures she faces are not meant to bring death, but “life from the dead.” (Romans 11:25)

On the other hand, for Christians to insist that Israel should keep all the land that God has brought her back to without reference to her spiritual condition is an error and many are making it! It relies on prophecies of her glorious future to prematurely place Israel in the Millennial era, while ignoring that great weight of the Hebrew prophets which persistently called her back to God. We must be patient with God and trust that He who brought her back thus far will not fail her now. She is planted back in her land for good, but as the past 50 years of conflict have amply shown, she is not immune from trouble in her borders.

Moreover, crucial to Israel’s domicile upon the land bequeathed to her is her treatment of the stranger in her midst. Israel was once a stranger in Egypt and was harshly dealt with by the Egyptians (Leviticus 19:34; Deuteronomy 24:17-18). She should therefore never become like them, recognizing that her freedom (Exodus) should also mean freedom, mercy and acceptance for the stranger. The stranger on the other hand must desire to live under her sovereignty to be the recipient of these blessings and benefits.

D. THE JUSTICE OF GOD

Some Jews are residing in territories whose political status is intensely disputed and populated by large numbers of Palestinians. These Palestinians often live under curfew and closures due to Israeli security measures imposed in response to terrorist threats and atrocities. The mass refugee problems from the 1948 and 1967 conflicts have been left to fester. Some liken the Palestinians’ situation to the ancient Canaanite people in the land when it was conquered under Joshua. Is God just, they ask, to gather His elect in a manner that has resulted in such loss and dispossession for fellow humans equally loved in His sight?

It must be vividly recalled here that a righteous God has also dealt severely with His own people Israel down through the centuries, making them pay “double” for all their sins (Isaiah 40:1-3; Jeremiah 16:18). In connection with these very sufferings inflicted by God upon His own people for disobedience, Paul in Romans 3:1-8 essentially asks the same tough questions being posed by pro-Palestinian Christians today, namely:

“But if our [Israel’s] unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.) May it never be! For otherwise how will God judge the world? ...And why not say... ‘Let us do evil that good may come?’ Their condemnation is just.”

In other words, God will never judge anyone who does not deserve it (Isaiah 3:11; Revelation 16:6). Further, He always remembers His mercy in the midst of judgment (II Samuel 24:14; Habakkuk 3:2).

Thus Christians must bear witness with the vision for coming world peace set forth in the Hebrew prophets and confirmed in the New Testament whereby God is now giving Israel a place in the land, even though the process may seem uncomfortable at times according to one’s humanistic sense of justice. Natural Israel is destined to

become spiritual Israel. We believe many Palestinians are thereby destined to be blessed alongside Israel.¹⁰¹ Paul says new life will arise within the Church as well, thereby impacting the world (Romans 11).

Until then, we can ease the travails of the birthing of the Messianic reign by praying for the Palestinians and loving them, as we should all men. It is well and proper for Christians to open their bowels of mercy to the Arabs of the land, and the ICEJ has been doing so for 25 years now to an extent far exceeding that of most of our Evangelical critics. But to be faithful to our Scriptures, there has to be a limit to political support for the Palestinian agenda if it seeks to deny Israel a place in the land promised to Abraham. Even more anathema to the Church should be the rising Islamic agenda now being preached to Palestinians and their Arab allies that sees the land of Israel as the place where Allah is gathering Jews for ultimate genocide.¹⁰²

E. MINISTRY OF COMFORT

“Comfort, O comfort My people,” says your God. “Speak kindly to Jerusalem; and call out to her, that her warfare has ended, that her iniquity has been removed, that she has received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.”

Isaiah 40:1-2

The painful centuries of dispersion and exile that stalked the Jewish people all the way to the depths of the Holocaust have left them with lingering collective wounds and suspicions as to the seemingly endless hostility of the world around them. The great weight of this suffering over the past two thousand years has been inflicted at the hands of those who professed the name of Jesus. Even though much of the Church today has sought to repent for the Christian anti-Semitism of our forbearers in the faith, we still must shoulder responsibility for its bitter legacy, and especially the fact that the attitudes and distortions behind these doctrines have now permeated the entire Arab/Islamic world. The origins of much of the religious, racist and conspiratorial forms of anti-Semitism widely circulating in the Arab world today stem back to Christian Europe, and the Church must confront them as to the error of repeating and furthering our own past mistakes.¹⁰³

This is why the mandate of the ICEJ as a ‘ministry of comfort’ to Israel and the Jewish people is so important for the wider Christian world to embrace, as it involves

¹⁰¹ See also, Mark Harlan, “A third theological path through the Israeli-Palestinian thicket,” *Christianity Today*, November 4, 2003.

¹⁰² Islamic religious leaders appointed by the Palestinian Authority have been openly calling on official PA TV for the murder of Jews until they are annihilated in keeping with the revived Islamic *hadith* (tradition) that Judgment Day only comes when Muslims slaughter any and all Jews they can find. See, Itamar Marcus, “PA religious leaders call for genocide of Jews,” *Palestinian Media Watch*, September 14, 2004. Hizb’ Allah leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah also is one of many prominent Muslim clerics now declaring that Allah is gathering all the Jews for extermination in one place “to save us the trouble of going after them worldwide.” Badih Chayban, “Nasrallah alleges ‘Christian Zionist’ plot,” *Beirut Daily Star*, October 23, 2002; See also, Jonathan D. Halevi, “Al-Qaeda’s Intellectual Legacy: New Radical Islamic Thinking Justifying the Genocide of Infidels,” *Jerusalem Viewpoints* No. 508, December 1, 2003; Yigal Carmon, “Contemporary Islamist Ideology Permitting Genocidal Murder,” *MEMRI*, January 27, 2004, posted at http://memri.org/bin/opener_latest.cgi?ID=SR2504.

¹⁰³ See, e.g., Gerstenfeld, “Jihad, Apocalypse, and Anti-Semitism,” posted at <http://www.jcpa.org/phas/phas-24.htm>.

Gentile believers, once their antagonists and pursuers, now reassuring the Jewish people they indeed remain elect of God and are finally home at last.

Yet many Christians who claim to be staunchly behind Israel and seek to ‘bless’ the Jewish people have read into Scripture a frightful ending still in store for them in the land. Turning squarely to the views of Dispensationalism, it is hard to comfort Israelis with the message that their Christian friends are going to fly off to glory one day while the Jews are left here to face yet one last bleak convert-or-die moment that ‘makes the Holocaust look like a picnic.’

First, it is not difficult to assess that the teaching that two-thirds of the Jews will die in The Tribulation so that one-third will fall on their knees and accept Jesus is in the nature of a “private interpretation” of prophecy that we are warned to eschew in II Peter 1:19-21. One primary source of this teaching is Zechariah 13:7-9, which actually happens to be an accurate prophecy of the dreadful days of the Jewish uprisings against Rome after the Romans had ‘struck’ Jesus the ‘Shepherd.’

During the Roman crackdowns on the Judean revolt of 66-70 AD and the Bar Kokhba revolt in 132-135 AD, roughly one-third of the Jews in the land died by the sword, another one-third died from famine and disease, while the remaining one-third were scattered to the four corners of the earth. The noted historian Josephus Flavius tells us 20,000 Jews died in one hour in Caesarea alone, while over 1,100,000 died in the siege of Jerusalem under Titus. As the siege drew out, multitudes in the city were starving to death, but dared not try to escape through the Romans lines to forage for food, since everyone who tried was being captured and crucified. The Romans took to daily hanging 500 fresh Jewish bodies on crosses in sight of the city to force its capitulation. Being forewarned by Jesus, the early Church fathers fled in 66 AD to Pella, in Jordan, and escaped harm. After another million Jews died in the Bar Kokhba rebellion, the remainder were driven into exile, while the Roman province of Judea was declared *Judenrein* and re-named *Palestina* in Latin in a disparaging reference to Israel’s long vanquished enemy, the Philistines.¹⁰⁴

No less than Jesus in Matthew 26:31 directs us to apply Zechariah 13:7-9 to that time and not today. He further verifies this beyond any doubt in his Mt. Olivet discourse recorded in both Matthew 24 and Luke 21, in which he draws heavily from a parallel and fuller prophetic account of these catastrophic onslaughts and scatterings by Rome in Ezekiel 5. In Luke, he warns his disciples of the impending “days of vengeance, in order that all things which are written may be fulfilled... they will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive into all nations.” (Luke 21:22, 24; cf. Ezekiel 5:12) Ezekiel is told to shave his hair and beard, divide it into thirds, burn one-third, strike one-third with a sword and scatter the other third to the wind (vs. 1-2). Yet he is told to take “a few in number from them and bind them in the edge of your robes.” (v. 3) How tender then the words of Jesus in warning his disciples to flee Jerusalem when they see it surrounded by armies, assuring them that “not a hair of your head will perish.” (Luke 21:18)

¹⁰⁴ See, *The Complete Works of Josephus*, Translated by William Whiston. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publishing, 1981; Charles Gulston, *Jerusalem: The Tragedy and the Triumph*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978; Marvin Wilson, *Our Father Abraham*; Shmuel Katz, *Battleground: Fact and Fantasy in Palestine*. New York: Bantam, 1977.

What was occurring in those days was none other than the ultimate wrath of God for Israel's rebellion set forth in the Torah. Towards the end of both Leviticus and Deuteronomy, the blessings and curses are spelled out by God according to their obedience or disobedience, with the curses getting progressively worse (seven times worse – Leviticus 26:18) if the sins of the people persist. By Deuteronomy 28:49, God begins declaring the harshest judgment He will ever inflict on the Jews, and if we read verses 53-57 – as Jesus most assuredly had – we can understand why He said, “Woe to those who are with child and to those who nurse babes in those days.” (Luke 21:23) Again, on the way to the cross, Jesus said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me, but weep for yourselves and your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.’” (Luke 23:28-30)

His pity over them was not because they might have to pack up infants quickly or be unable to give milk, but because he knew from what was ‘written’ that they were going to be trapped in such a horrific siege on Jerusalem that it would force them to choose between their own crucifixion and the unthinkable temptation to consume one's own offspring to keep from starving to death. Jesus had seen the abominations at the Temple and knew from reading Leviticus 26:28-29, Deuteronomy 28:56-57 and Ezekiel 5:10 that this was coming upon that generation.

These are not easy thoughts to absorb, but it soberly demonstrates that prophecy is no guessing game! We absolutely must be good stewards of the mysteries of God and bring our spiritual understanding back into line with the Word of God, the seasons of God and the purpose of God. We need to grasp that God set a limit to His wrath upon His people. In Matthew 24:21-22, notice that Jesus follows Ezekiel's characterization of this Roman siege as the time of an unprecedented judgment of God against His own people, where the prophet declares, “Because of your abominations, I will do among you what I have not done, and the like of which I will never do again... Thus My anger will be spent.” (Ezekiel 5:9, 13)

There are still portions of Matthew 24 and Luke 21 that will be accomplished in future, and many dark times ahead for the whole world before the dawn of Messiah's reign.¹⁰⁵ But it should be nigh impossible for any Christian to ever think that God still has something like this in store for Israel that would bring her to redemption. And even if such thinking persists, where is the heart of Abraham in God's people today that would plead upon learning of such pending judgment, ‘Lord, does it really have to be this way?’ (see Genesis 18)

By rightly dividing the word of truth, we can confidently make several assertions based on the Lord's Mt. Olivet discourse and related passages:

- (1) Jesus agreed with the prophets that the Temple was to be destroyed due to the sins of the priesthood, and the ‘Kingdom of God,’ His divine presence, was promptly entrusted to a small band of 120 Jewish believers in Jesus when the Church was born on the Day of Pentecost. The fact that within 200 years that Church was largely Gentile is not a testament that the Kingdom was ripped

¹⁰⁵ For fascinating insights into rightly dividing the ‘now’ and ‘later’ portions of Matthew 24 and Luke 21 (Mark 13 as well), see, Flusser, *Jesus*, pp. 237-250.

from the Jews forever, but rather a testimony to the effectiveness and zeal of the original Jewish Apostles in preaching the Gospel to all nations (Matthew 21:43; Acts 2:1ff, 28:31; Colossians 1:6).

- (2) The subsequent tragedy of the Holocaust was of Satanic origin and not some divine retribution on the Jews for their sins, as even some Jewish kabbalists explain.¹⁰⁶ Yet God turned that sorrowful moment into the means by which to rebirth the nation of Israel in her homeland (Ezekiel 37).
- (3) God is gathering the Jewish people not for virtual annihilation and yet another scattering, but for repentance and redemption. If the Holocaust drove many Jews away from God, how shall another one draw them to Him? Rather, we believe that although it will occur in a time of great troubles for Israel and all nations, the manner of national Israel's spiritual recovery is set forth wonderfully in Romans 11, Revelation 11 and elsewhere, and involves the Kingdom of God making a most dynamic return to the court of the altar (see Joel 2; Zechariah 4).

Accordingly, the ICEJ still believes in and faithfully awaits the Rapture of the saints at "the coming of the Lord" as revealed in I Thessalonians 4:13-18, II Thessalonians 2:1-8 and elsewhere. While we do not know the moment, we believe this occurs only once the 'natural olive branches' have been grafted back into their own natural olive tree of faith, bringing up 'life from the dead' at the roots – meaning such incredible resurrection power in the earth that all the "dead in Christ shall rise first [and] then we who are alive and remain (Jew and Gentile) shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." (I Thessalonians 4:13-18) In this way, there are not separate fates for the Church and for Israel, but instead one fold, the 'Israel of God,' all 'sons of Abraham' and only one "coming of the Lord." (I Thessalonians 4:15)¹⁰⁷

In this manner, the Church can both "Comfort ye My People" Israel (Isaiah 40:1) and "comfort one another with these words." (I Thessalonians 4:18)

Our perception is that the Dispensationalist approach to Scripture takes far too many Old Testament prophecies and applies them literally to our day, without taking into account their original context. It is not able to 'check off' key passages and conclude that they have already happened. Thus all manner of dark prophecies from Daniel, Ezekiel and elsewhere get crammed into the seven years of the Tribulation, even things that Jesus accurately told His own disciples were going to happen in their lifetimes. By stating this, we do not mean to aver that all of the Olivet discourse has been fulfilled, nor do we abandon the notion of 'progressive prophetic fulfillment' – that prophetic scriptures can have more than one fulfillment over time (*e.g.*, Joel 2). But we are convinced that 'private' interpretations of prophecy crept into the Church and must now be cleared away so that our minds can fully appreciate what our hearts are unmistakably sensing about God's tremendous love for Israel.

¹⁰⁶ See, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, *Handbook of Jewish Thought*. Vol. 2, Maznaim Publishing, excerpted at http://www.aish.com/literacy/concepts/The-Pre-Messianic_Era.asp.

¹⁰⁷ The related subjects of Israel's spiritual recovery and the Rapture will be covered more extensively in future papers in this series.

F. MINISTRY OF WARNING

"I was angry with My people, I profaned My heritage And gave them into your hand. You did not show mercy to them."

Isaiah 47:6

There is a great temptation facing the nations today and we fear many will succumb to it. It is true that God has used peoples, nations and kingdoms to discipline and even disinvest Israel of her land, but woe came upon those nations who did so because their intention is always evil and they will because of this bring themselves into conflict with Him (Zechariah 1:14-15). God raised up Babylon and its king, Nebuchadnezzar, whom He called "My servant," to be an instrument of judgment over Israel, and yet in a divine paradox, He also promises a terrifying judgment against Babylon for what it did to Israel and chiefly because they rejoiced over Israel's calamity and showed no mercy (Jeremiah 25:7-11; Jeremiah 50:1-13; Isaiah 47:1-7).

The believing Church must therefore sound a trumpet call warning to Israel and to the nations. To Israel this call is to beckon her back to her God and to the nations this call is one of warning. That is, if they persist in permanently dividing the land and thereby disinheriting the Jewish people, they will incur the wrath and displeasure of God (Joel 3:1-3).

Jeremiah 30:11 says of Israel: "For I am with thee, saith the Lord, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet I will not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished."

We have noted how many Christians are opposed to Zionism because they cannot reconcile it with their own concepts of a God Who demands 'justice.' Yet God is indeed just and will never judge the earth without giving us due warning.

Jesus said in Matthew 24:36, "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah." From the narrative of the flood recorded in Genesis 6:1 – 9:17, we understand that God wanted to judge the earth for its total rebellion against Him, but to be just decided to give them a warning 'sign' of what was coming.

From Hebrews 11:7, we know that Noah's faith and reverence before God in building the ark over 120 years was the means by which God "condemned the world" and thus justified His severe actions. The ark was a sign given by God that could be seen by all humanity, taking away any excuse that the world had not been warned. Not only that, but God in His mercy also gave them another chance, as the crucified Christ went and preached to all who perished in the flood, according to I Peter 3:18-20.

It is clear from Scripture that the promised time of restoration for Israel taking place in our day is the divinely chosen and unmistakable warning sign openly seen before all nations, that He is coming to judge humanity's continuous rebellion against Him and will be justified in so doing. It is humanity's enduring rebellion against God, His Word and His Messiah that culminates in the Battle of Armageddon, thereby giving

birth to the long-awaited Messianic reign of righteousness and peace on the earth. Is it any wonder then that one of the Hebrew roots of *tzion* means, “to make a conspicuous mark or sign”?¹⁰⁸

This is confirmed in Isaiah 54:7-10, where God equates His unchangeable covenantal promise to restore and redeem Israel to His judgment in the flood, saying “For this is like the days of Noah to Me.” Jeremiah 33:25-26 also verifies this.

Psalm 102:12-22 declares it as well! This Psalm says it is written for a “generation to come,” (literally in Hebrew *dor acharon* or “last generation”) in order that they might know there is an “appointed time” of favor on Zion, when the “Lord shall build up Zion” before all men and then “appear in His glory,” so that “the nations will fear the name of the Lord... That men may tell of the name of the Lord in Zion, and His praise in Jerusalem; When the peoples are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the Lord.”

Just as Noah faithfully built the ark and thereby ‘condemned the world,’ the fact that a remnant of Christians in the earth today have understood the significance of Israel’s restoration from God’s Word and are humbly helping to ‘build up Zion,’ means that the world will have no excuse when they encounter the wrath of God.

This final confrontation between the nations and the Messiah of God will never be initiated by or result from some dark hidden agenda allegedly espoused by Christian Zionists. Rather, it is our God-given task to continue with the building up of Zion in humble faith and reverence before the Lord, as did Noah, knowing it is ever signaling for people and nations to turn from their rebellious ways.

It is true then that God will use the present difficulties in Israel to afflict, save and deliver her, and use them to judge the nations, unmask their anti-Semitism and antagonism against Himself. We may not always know the exact timing and manner of God’s Sovereign acts, but we do know it is the season of favor the Jewish people have long awaited (see I Thessalonians 5:1-5). God’s sure promise is one of deliverance for Israel and by doing so He will reveal His existence and character to the nations. That is, through the process now unfolding before us the God of the Bible will vindicate His Word, His Messiah and the unique role that Israel has played out in history for the redemption of the world (Ezekiel 38:18-23).

There may be no greater choice confronting the Church today than what will we do with the sign given to this generation. Will we be like Noah in faithfully building up Zion in humility and reverence before God and with pleas of mercy for all humanity? Will we call God unjust and His handiwork in Zion a reproach, while leaving men to perish? Or will we continue buying sensational books about the coming flood and sit back hoping in our hearts that God proves our prophecy charts right, leaving even more men to perish?

¹⁰⁸ *Strong’s Concise Bible Dictionary*, entry 06725.

CONCLUSION

“For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself...”

Colossians 1:19-20

We have boundless hope and complete faith that one day the nations will indeed ‘beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks.’ But this only will come about when the suffering Messiah returns as the kingly Messiah to judge the earth at the very moment the nations have channeled all their rebellion against God into one final attempt to eradicate the Jewish people restored to their land. Nevertheless, the Church will have the most incredible opportunity in that darkness before the dawn, as multitudes will finally see the truth of God’s Word and come running to us for answers.

Therefore, it is our sacred task as that day approaches to be the first to beat our own ‘swords into ploughshares’ and our ‘spears into pruning hooks,’ wielding the precious gift of the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17) not as an instrument to wound brethren or to impulsively consign multitudes to an eternity separated from Him, but rather as an instrument for reaping fields white with harvest until that great day.

Based upon all of the foregoing, we are able to make the following conclusions:

- 1) Replacement theology holds that the Church has completely replaced Israel as God’s agent of redemption in the world. Dispensationalist teaching holds that the Church has temporarily replaced Israel as His redemptive agent for the Church age, which ends with a pre-Tribulation Rapture of the Church and God turning His attention back on Israel. Neither view is consistent with the Word of God nor the message and revelation the Church must embrace in this critical hour.
- 2) Christian support for Israel must adhere to “Biblical Zionism,” which is founded upon Covenantal Theology and understands that the hope of salvation for our own Christian faith is anchored in God’s immutable resolve and ability to be faithful to His covenant of grace with Abraham, in which God sought to redeem *one* people from the earth.
- 3) Covenantal Theology holds that this eternal purpose of God is hidden and contained within His covenant promises delivered to Abraham, Moses and David, which were honored and expounded upon by the Hebrew prophets, confirmed by Jesus in His life and atoning sacrifice, revealed to the New Testament Apostles as stewards of the mysteries of God, and will find ultimate fulfillment in the return of Messiah to a Jerusalem no longer trodden down of the Gentile nations, but home to a restored Israel beckoning His return.
- 4) This time of restoration of Israel to her land and to her God in our day is vouched for by the holy prophets, affirmed in the faithful and true words of Jesus, and given prominent place in Peter’s preaching of the Gospel and Paul’s teachings as the Apostle to the Gentiles. Therefore, we can boldly state that no man’s Gospel is complete without reference to and affirmation of the promised final restoration of Israel.

- 5) This promised time of restoration for Israel taking place in our day is also the divinely chosen and unmistakable warning sign openly seen before all nations, that He is coming to judge humanity's continuous rebellion against Him and will be justified in so doing.
- 6) The Battle of Armageddon foretold in the book of Revelation is to be understood as one final act of humanity's rebellion against God and will never be initiated by or result from some dark hidden agenda allegedly espoused by Christian Zionists.
- 7) Rather, we are Christians whose Zionism is founded upon and motivated by the promise of an epoch of righteousness and peace for the whole earth known in the Bible as the Millennial reign of Messiah, a vision of world peace that humanity has known about and aspired to for generations, while being largely ignorant of the manner in which God will birth it into being – the now raging controversy surrounding Israel's restoration.
- 8) We encourage all humanity that this Messianic age is open to anyone who would dare open their hearts to the Lord Who made them.
- 9) The Jewish people have not returned to Israel for another appointed time of God's wrath whereby two-thirds die in the Tribulation so that one-third will call on the name of the Lord, but for an incredibly life-giving repentance and revelation of the Messiah first promised to them.
- 10) Therefore, we encourage our long-suffering Jewish brothers and friends not to lose heart in the midst of the current struggle over the land of Israel, nor be fearful or reticent as to the comfort and support offered by sincere Christians, knowing that when your prolonged wait is over for *your* promised Messiah, He will be everything that God solemnly promised to you – a Redeemer, a Deliverer, a Comforter and a Righteous King to sit on the throne of David over an Israel and an earth finally at rest. Indeed, Messiah will reconcile all things within Himself.